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ΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ.

SERMONS

OF

JOHN BAPTIST MASSILLON

AND

LEWIS BOURDALOUE,

TWO CELEBRATED FRENCH PREACHERS.

ALSO,

A SPIRITUAL PARAPHRASE

OF SOME OF

The Psalms,

IN THE FORM OF

DEVOUT MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

TRANSLATED BY REV. ABEL FLINT,
Pastor of a Church in Hartford.

HARTFORD:
PRINTED BY LINCOLN AND GLEASON.
1805.

District of Connecticut, ss.

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" *Sermons of John Baptist Massillon, and Lewis Bourdaloue,* " *two celebrated French preachers. Also, a Spiritual Paraphrase* " *of some of the Psalms, in the form of Devout Meditations and* " *Prayers. By J. B. Massillon. Translated by Rev.* ABEL " FLINT, *Pastor of a Church in Hartford.*"

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PREFACE.

JOHN B. Massillon and Lewis Bourdaloue were two celebrated French preachers, who flourished the one in the beginning of the last, and the other at the close of the preceding century. Doctor Blair, in his Lectures on Elocution, speaks of them as follows: "Among the French Roman Catholic divines, the two most distinguished "are Bourdaloue and Massillon. It is a "subject of dispute among the French critics, to which of these the preference is due, "and each of them have their several partizans. To Bourdaloue, they attribute "more solidity and close reasoning; to Massillon, a more pleasing and engaging manner. Bourdaloue inculcates his doctrines "with much zeal, piety, and earnestness. "Massillon has more grace, more sentiment, and in my opinion, every way more "genius. He discovers much knowledge "both of the world and of the human heart; "he is pathetic and persuasive; and upon "the whole, is perhaps, the most eloquent "writer of sermons which modern times "have produced."

The Translator, from the account given of these preachers by Doctor Blair, and others

who had read their writings, was induced, some years since, to procure them; and for his own instruction and amusement, he translated several sermons of each of these authors, and also part of a work of Massillon, entitled a spiritual Paraphrase of some of the Psalms. Some of these Translations he now offers to the public.

The two first Sermons in this volume were preached by Massillon to a Synod, and the third to a number of young ministers, at a College. Some of the observations in these discourses may not be applicable to the Clergy of this country; but the general strain of them is applicable to all the ministers of Christ, and in them they will see many parts of their duty strikingly inculcated, and ministerial faithfulness urged by weighty motives. The necessity of zeal and engagedness in their work, the characteristics of true ministerial zeal, and, the spirit of the ministry, are here illustrated with great force and beauty.

The fourth Sermon by Massillon, and the fifth by Bourdaloue, are upon a common though all will acknowledge a very important subject. The closing scene of life is a very interesting period in man's existence, and one on which every person ought frequently to meditate.

The sixth Sermon, by Bourdaloue, is up-

on Spiritual Blindness, and it is thought will afford instruction to the attentive reader.

The Paraphrase of some of the Psalms was written by Massillon in the latter part of his life, and, as the Editor of the original work observes, "It is to be regretted that "he did not in this way go through the "whole Book of Psalms. There is perhaps "no work which, in a more striking man-"ner, exhibits the emotions of the heart, "when lamenting past sins, or when, hav-"ing renounced the world and its false bles-"sings, it acknowledges that being created "for God, it can find consolation and hap-"piness only in God."

Respecting this Paraphrase the original Editor further observes, "It is not a Com-"mentary upon the Psalms; it is neither "the historical nor the prophetical sense "which the Author pretends to explain. It "is not, properly speaking, a Paraphrase; "for a Paraphrase adds nothing to the text "when it is clear, it only endeavors to ren-"der obscure passages more clear by add-"ing to them. But the object of Massil-"lon was to furnish models for prayer and "devout meditation. Taking a verse or "part of a verse, and sometimes more than "one verse, as a theme, he pursues a train "of reflections adapted to the subject."

In some instances these reflections may

not appear to the English reader to be such as would naturally arise from the words. This is owing to the Translation of the Psalms which the Author used, and which in many places, differs in the turn of the expression from that in our Bibles. See the Note at the bottom of the 189th page in this book.

The Translator of this volume is very sensible that he has not infused into the translation the peculiar spirit and beauty of the originals. Those who have ever attempted to turn one language into another must have found it extremely difficult to preserve in a translation the characteristic excellences of the original. This difficulty arises from two sources;—every language has its peculiar idioms, and every writer has a style and manner peculiar to himself. The Translator has endeavored to adhere as closely to the originals as the different idioms of the two languages would admit. He has not intentionally misrepresented any sentiment, nor has he added any thing of his own; he has however omitted several sentences, because as they alluded to some of the peculiar doctrines or ceremonies of the Romish Church, he judged they would not be interesting or instructive to the Protestant reader.

HARTFORD, August 14, 1805.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

THE NECESSITY OF ZEAL IN MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL AGAINST VICES AND SCANDALS.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

JOHN II. 15.

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple.

Page 13.

SERMON II.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE MINISTERIAL ZEAL.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

ROMANS X. 2.

——— They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

P. 39.

SERMON III.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MINISTRY.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

LUKE II. 22, 23.

And—they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord; As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

p. 69.

SERMON IV.

ON DEATH.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

LUKE VII. 12.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

p. 91.

SERMON V.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

BY L. BOURDALOUE.

LUKE VII. 12, 13.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.

p. 121.

SERMON VI.

ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

BY L. BOURDALOUE.

JOHN IX. 1.

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

p. 145.

PARAPHRASE OF THE PSALMS.

PSALM I.

The happiness of a soul returning to God.

p. 173.

PSALM III.

Meditations of a devout soul deeply affected with a sense of the enormity of past sin; and at the same time full of confidence in the mercy of God.

p. 177.

PSALM IV.

Reflections of a pious soul when under trouble from the loss of worldly enjoyments.

p. 183.

PSALM VI.

Meditations of a sinner lately brought to a sense of his sins; lamenting them before God; imploring divine mercy, for the pardon of sin, and a deliverance from his deplorable situation; and finally obtaining a comfortable hope.

p. 191.

PSALM VII.

Meditations and prayers suitable for a pious person when calumniated by enemies.

p. 196.

PSALM VIII.

Adoration of the divine perfections, as manifested in the works of creation; and thanksgiving to God for his wonderful goodness to man.

p. 200.

PSALM X.

Devout meditations and addresses to God, suitable for a person under affliction, when viewing the prosperity of the wicked, and the calamities which befall the righteous in this world.

p. 205.

PSALM XI.

Meditations of a saint, when persecuted by enemies, stirring up himself to forbear resentment, and to put his trust in the Lord; and seriously warning those who persecute and injure their fellow men, of the misery which will come upon them, if they do not repent.

p. 221.

PSALM XII.

Serious addresses to God of a saint lamenting the general corruption of the world, and praying for grace to enable him to resist temptation and persevere in holiness.

p. 228.

PSALM XIV.

Meditations of a saint upon the great prevalence of infidelity and irreligion in the world.

p. 238.

PSALM XVI.

Meditations of a saint engaged necessarily in worldly scenes; with thanksgiving to God for having preserved him in the midst of so many temptations and dangers, and prayer for continued supplies of grace.

p. 250.

PSALM XIX.

Meditations of a saint who, to strengthen himself in his fidelity to God, celebrates the divine perfections as manifested in the immensity of the heavens,—devoutly acknowledges the excellence, holiness, and sublimity of the divine law,—and prays for grace to keep him from sin.

p. 262.

PSALM XXIII.

Thanksgivings rendered by a saint to God, for having turned him from the ways of sin, and called him to a knowledge of the truth; with a comparison of his present with his former situation.

p. 274.

PSALM XXVIII.

Meditations of a saint bewailing before God the impious derisions to which he finds himself exposed, in consequence of his piety, from those with whom he is obliged to live; and prayer for grace to enable him to continue stedfast in the love and service of God, notwithstanding the temptations and difficulties in his way.

p. 281.

PSALM XXIX.

Thanksgiving rendered to God, by a new convert, for that gracious and powerful voice which had so wonderfully called him to a sense of sin, and finally to a knowledge and love of the truth.

p. 291.

PSALM XXX.

Reflections of a saint reviewing the sinful and miserable state from which God had graciously delivered him, and giving thanks for the wonderful mercy which had been shown to him.

p. 298.

Sermon I.

THE NECESSITY OF ZEAL IN MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL, AGAINST VICES AND SCANDALS. A SERMON PREACHED TO A SYNOD.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

JOHN II. 15.

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple.

THE first exercise of Jesus Christ's ministry, in Jerusalem, was an exercise of zeal against an abuse which dishonored the glory of his Father and the holiness of his house. That divine mildness, which till then had been displayed in all his actions, was turned into a holy severity; he could not suffer a public scandal which seemed to insult religion, even in its most holy and most respectable asylum. In vain did the false piety of the Pharisees tolerate this; in vain did the avarice of the chief ministers of the temple protect it; in vain did an ancient and public custom seem to authorize it: these very motives animated him with new indignation; and the more difficult and dangerous it appeared to remedy so public an abuse and indecency, the less delay and temporising did he use in removing it from the holy place.

Zeal against vices and scandals, which affront the glory of God and dishonor the holiness of religion,

was, then, the first example which Christ left to his ministers, in the public exercise of his ministry, in Jerusalem. He sends forth his ministers like lambs, which are silent and show only mildness when they themselves are ill treated; but which know how to raise their voices and roar like lions, when any insult is offered to the glory of the Lord, whose ministers they have the honor to be. He disapproved, it is true, of the zeal of the two disciples, who wished to bring down fire from heaven upon an unbelieving city; but he blamed only the impetuosity and fierceness of their zeal. He condemned that zeal which seeks to punish rather than to correct; and taught us, that zeal without charity is but a sally of passion, not a gracious exercise. In fine, he has forewarned us that we cannot indeed take from his kingdom all things that offend; but it is his will, that we incessantly denounce misery and an eternal anathema against every one who shall wilfully offend his brother; that we zealously condemn the offences which we cannot correct, or at least, that we mourn in secret on account of those which we are not permitted publicly to condemn.

In this discourse, I propose, First, To show that zeal against vices and scandals is a most essential duty of a Christian minister: Secondly, To point out the reasons why there is so little zeal in most ministers.

I. From the time of our ordination it became our duty to be co-workers with God in the salvation of our fellow men; in forming a spiritual, holy, and faithful people, an assembly of saints, who might glorify God in all ages.

A priest is, therefore, a sacred minister, appointed to take charge of the interests of the Lord upon earth, and to promote the sanctification of men. He perpetuates here below the mission of the Son of

God, and his love to man, by perpetuating his prophetical office. The prayers, the desires, the studies, the watchings, the labors, the employments of a Christian minister should, therefore, have for their objects the glory of God and salvation of mankind. Whatever has no relation to these great objects is foreign from the holiness of his calling: he departs from his proper character, he dishonors it, he renounces the sublimity of his vocation, he loads and disgraces himself with the infamy of a species of apostasy, as soon as he has other cares and other employments than those which tend to advance the kingdom of Christ, and to influence men to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Elijah, ascending to heaven, and leaving his spirit of zeal with his disciple Elisha, was a type of Christ, who, having ascended to the right hand of his Father, sent down upon his disciples that spirit of zeal and fire which was to be the seal of their mission and of their call to the ministerial office; and which was to attend them while carrying to all nations the knowledge of salvation and the love of truth and righteousness. Hardly were these men filled with this holy spirit, when though before so timid, so anxious to conceal themselves, and to escape from the fury of the Jews, they boldly came out from their retreat; drew every thing after them; knew no more danger; manifested an intrepidity which defied all the powers of the world; boldly rendered testimony to the resurrection of their Lord, before the chief priests when assembled together, and came from their assembly rejoicing that they were found worthy to suffer reproach for his holy name.

Even all Judea could not satisfy the ardor and extent of their zeal; they went from city to city, from province to province, from nation to nation; they dispersed themselves to the extremities of the earth; they attacked abuses the most ancient and the most authorized; they took from the most barbarous peo-

ple the idols which their ancestors had long worshipped; they overthrew altars which the incense and the homage of many ages had rendered respectable; they preached the opprobrium and the foolishness of the cross, to the most polished nations, who prided themselves in their eloquence, their philosophy, and their wisdom. The obstacles which every thing presented to their zeal, instead of discouraging them, animated them, and seemed to announce to them success; the whole world conspired against them, and they were stronger than the world; crosses and gibbets were shown to them, to compel them to be silent, but they replied, that they could not forbear to publish what they had seen and heard; and they proclaimed upon the house tops what they were forbidden to trust to the ear in private. They expired under the hand of public executioners; new torments were invented to exterminate them, and with them the doctrine which they preached; but their blood still preached it after their death; nay, the more the earth was inundated with it, the more new disciples to the gospel did it produce. Such was the spirit of the priesthood and the apostleship which they received; for the priesthood and the apostleship form, in one sense, the same ministry; and every priest is the apostle and ambassador of Jesus Christ among men.

Behold, my brethren, to what we are called, by receiving the imposition of hands. It is true, we are not required to go among barbarous nations, to preach the doctrine of the cross, and to besprinkle the most distant lands with our blood, to make the gospel fruitful, and to lead those people to a knowledge of a Saviour who have not yet heard of him. This is a service reserved for a small number of apostolic laborers, who perpetuate the first spirit with the first duties of the apostleship, and who, by their labors, are continually advancing the accomplishment of the prophecies and promises, respect-

ing the fulness of the nations which are one day to enter into the New Jerusalem. But our mission, by being less laborious and less extensive, is not the less apostolic. We may leave those uncultivated and savage countries to generous missionaries, who crossing extensive seas and encountering the barbarity of savage nations, go to scatter the holy seed; while it belongs to us to extirpate, from the field of Jesus Christ, the tares and scandals which are continually springing up in it. If our zeal is not sufficiently heroic to conquer new nations, and to add new countries to his heritage, we ought, at least, to cultivate those which our predecessors acquired for him, and which long since became his possession. They found these fields consecrated to demons, and stained with the blood of profane sacrifices. The barbarity and blindness of our ancestors, jealous to madness of a worship so impious and so foolish, did not affright them; they published the doctrine of salvation; the devil, for a long time, defended his temples and his altars against their zeal; he armed against them the superstition of the people; cities and fields flowed with their blood; and, to this day, there are subsisting among us monuments pointing out the places where those generous defenders of the faith, delivered up to the fury of the wicked, consummated their sacrifice. These respectable monuments still appear in most of the cities in France, and embellish them more than the statues and columns which the vanity of conquerors has raised; since these vain trophies transmit to succeeding ages nothing but the memory of calamities suffered by conquered nations; whilst these religious monuments remind us of whole nations brought to the knowledge of salvation, delivered from the captivity of the devil, and conquered for the Redeemer, by the blood and ministry of those Christian heroes. But, happy for the world, the Christian faith was not extinguished and buried with them; even their executioners became afterwards

their disciples ; and so to express it, new Apostles sprung up from their ashes ; and this nation, where the impiety and mysterious abominations of the Druids had, for a long time, constituted all the religion of our ancestors, embraced the Christian faith. This portion, those primitive defenders of the faith have transmitted to our care, to us who glory in being their successors. The lapse of time, which, by the inevitable destiny of human affairs, always introduces a change of manners and a relaxation of discipline, has indeed impaired its first purity, and disfigured its beauty. The holy doctrines which they left, have, it is true, come down to our times ; but our morals are far from having been preserved pure ; and though we retain the same faith as our fathers we are far from possessing the same fervor and the same holiness.

Our duty then is to restore to the heritage of Jesus Christ its pristine beauty. If it was still necessary to wrest it from the empire of the devil, and from idolatry, and to gain it, at the price of our blood, as our holy predecessors have done, the danger and the greatness of the enterprise might alarm our weakness ; but we find it already acquired for Christ, and by the zeal and the sufferings of our fathers, established as his possession and his patrimony ; the only thing now to be done is to repair its ruins. It is no more necessary, in the work of the gospel, to expose ourselves to racks and gibbets ; nothing is wanted but zeal—but to respect our ministry—but to feel engaged for the glory of our Lord, and against the offences which afflict and dishonor his heritage ;—in one word, but to remember that we are his ministers and Apostles, and that we succeed those who gave up their lives to gain for him the people who are committed to our charge. We glory in being their successors in the ministry ; but our glory is nothing, unless, at the same time, we succeed them in their spirit and their zeal. They raised the holy edifice in

spite of winds and storms which exposed them every moment to be buried under its ruins; they cemented it with their blood; they were its laborious founders, and we are only its peaceable guardians and keepers: our most painful duties are but to efface the spots which time has produced—to restore to that which is tarnished its former beauty—to support that which totters and threatens ruin—in fine, to close the entrance of this holy place against the impure, or rather to influence them to present themselves before it, like the publican, smiting on the breast, and with a heart broken by repentance. In short, that which was great, that which was heroic, that which seemed to surpass the powers of nature, our predecessors have accomplished. What remains for us to do is almost nothing; it is to preserve for our master what they acquired for him—to watch for fear that an enemy should sow tares in the holy field—to cultivate the plants, which our heavenly father has planted therein—and to water them continually with the waters of spiritual instruction, lest a deadly drought should stop their growth.

Shall we be excuseable if we refuse to perform services so agreeable, so easy, so consoling? Shall we deserve to bear the name of ministers of Christ, and to be the successors of those apostolic men, if we suffer the precious fruit of their blood and their labors to perish through our indolence? if, with a tranquil eye, we see iniquity and wickedness continually prevailing among men—scandals become almost public usages—faith, dead, and void of charity and good works, in the greater part of nominal Christians—God almost unknown among us, as he was formerly in idolatrous Athens—and the people of purchase, the holy nation, Christians, formerly a sweet-smelling savor to Christ in the midst of a Pagan and corrupt world, respected even by the enemies of Christianity for the purity and holiness of their manners, dishonoring God by excesses at which Pagans would

blush, and causing religion to be blasphemed by the impious?

Whence comes it, then, that the desolation of the heritage of Christ, of which we are every day witnesses, does not affect us? Whence comes it, that we think we have discharged our duty, when we have repeated, often without attention, certain prayers which the Church enjoins; and performed, with negligence, certain external duties of divine worship, belonging to our particular offices in the Church? Are we priests only to show ourselves in the temple—only to appear clothed with the pomp and dignity of the priesthood—to decorate our bodies with vain apparel, and suffer our brethren to perish, who are living temples of the Holy Spirit? Is not the most essential of our duties, that at least to which all others have reference, the salvation of mankind? The work of the gospel is committed to us; and if we are of no utility to our brethren, we are usurpers of the priesthood; we have no right to the title, any further than we have zeal to perform the duties, of a priest.

II. Let us, my brethren, enquire into the sources of an error so common among the ministers of the Church. Whence comes it, that the zeal of the house of the Lord—that a holy ardor for the sanctification of the people—that an ardent desire to enlarge the Redeemer's kingdom—that a lively grief at seeing his doctrines despised, and the greater part of our fellow men perishing; whence comes it that these dispositions, so worthy of our profession—so conformed to our calling—so honorable to our ministry—so common formerly among the first laborers in the gospel, are so rare, at present, among the clergy?—Whence comes an evil so universal and so deplorable? Never has the Church seen its altars surrounded by so many ministers; never has the vineyard of Jesus Christ nourished more laborers, capable of working therein. And on the other hand, never was

there more need of faithful ministers; never did the multiplicity of sins and scandals render zeal more necessary. Whence comes it then, I again ask, that this zeal, more necessary at the present day than ever, seems extinguished in the greater part of those whom it ought to enflame? Behold the reasons.—

In some, it is because they are placed in easy and affluent circumstances; either by the liberality of the Church, or by inheriting the patrimony of their fathers. This authorizes them, they think, to lead an easy, tranquil life; and they consider their affluence as a privilege which exempts them from the laborious duties of the ministry. They leave to those who are in indigent circumstances, the care of the glory of God, of the honor of the Church, and of the salvation of their fellow men for whom Christ died. As if the functions of the priesthood, so holy —so sublime—so superior, in some respects, even to the ministry of Angels, like mechanic arts, had no other end than to contribute to our temporal necessities; as if it is only want and indigence, and not zeal, duty, charity, which are to procure laborers for the gospel; as if to co-operate in the work of the salvation of men—to render the sacrifice and mediation of the Redeemer useful to them—to be God's ministers in the consummation of his elect—to continue upon earth the great work which the only Son of God was sent to begin, was a mercenary employment, reserved for those whom hunger and poverty should oblige to engage in it; who should find themselves condemned to it, as to a slavish work, by the misfortune of their birth; and as if sordid gain alone was to furnish co-workers with Jesus Christ, ministers of the Church, and stewards of the mysteries of God to men.

Admit that you can live without the temporal assistance of the people; are you the less their spiritual fathers and guides? Admit that you do not live by the altar; are you the less devoted to its service?

When the Church honored you with the priesthood, did she mean only to decorate you with an idle title; and not to associate you with her laborers and her ministers? Would she have called you to her assistance, by the imposition of hands, and made you partakers in her honors, if you had declared that you should take no part in her labors? All the titles with which you were invested by ordination are laborious titles; they imply a love for the service and solicitude to discharge its duties. It is love alone in God which induces him to appoint ministers in his Church; and it is love alone which renders any worthy of the ministry. What, my brethren! Because the goodness of God has placed you in opulence, shall his benefits authorize you to be more ungrateful, more unfaithful to his commands and to the duties of your calling? This opulence was designed by him, in his Providence, to aid you in discharging your functions, and to facilitate their success; not to furnish you with a pretext to neglect them. As soon as the order of Heaven consecrated you to the ministry, you became obliged, whether rich or poor, to be laborious in the service, and to fulfil your ministry, after the example of the Apostles, in poverty and in opulence. Your property forbids you to live at the expense of the altar; but it does not exempt you from its services; on the contrary, it is by serving it at your own expense, that you will serve it with a blessing and with success. The Apostle Paul considered it as a source of singular glory, and one cause of the splendid success of his apostleship, that he had preached the gospel gratuitously. You know, said he to some of the primitive Christians, that I have not been chargeable to you; that though like the other Apostles, I might have exacted of you temporal good things, for the spiritual which I ministered to you, yet I would not use this right; and that the labor of my hands alone has supported my necessities in my apostolical travels. This generous disinterestedness

he considered as having contributed, under the blessing of God, to the immense fruits which the word of the gospel had produced among them under his ministry.

Indeed a holy minister, who, not satisfied with sacrificing his cares, his health, his watchings for the instruction of the people, sacrifices to them likewise the wealth which Providence has given him; who provides, at the same time, for the wants of the soul and of the body; with what respect does he inspire the people for a ministry capable of rendering those who exercise it so generous and so charitable? With what blessings may not a minister of this character hope to see his labors accomplished? Shall then the very circumstance which promises you the most success in your labors occasion you to neglect them? And because Providence has furnished you with more means of being useful to mankind, do you think yourselves under no obligations to assist them? This is the first source of a want of zeal, being placed in an easy, affluent situation.

But the truth is, this is but a pretence to justify us in leading an indolent life, and in neglecting the painful duties of the ministry: the true reason why we neglect our duty is the cold and languishing frame of our hearts; it is a want of love to God, and benevolence to our fellow men. In vain, my brethren, do our manners present to the eyes of men a commendable regularity; in vain is nothing noticed in our conduct which wounds the decency and gravity of our characters; we are dead in the view of God; a love of him inseparable from that which we owe to our brethren, is absolutely extinguished in our hearts. Our regularity is but a decent attention which we pay to the world, and to the seriousness of our calling; while we give nothing to God. Indeed, if we loved him; if his glory was dearer to us than our own, charged as we are, by our ministry, with his interests, could we, with a tranquil eye, see his glory every

day, and in every place, outraged by excesses and vices which are spread over the face of the earth?

Paul, at the sight of the superstitions of Athens, struck at seeing that great people, who prided themselves so much in their wisdom, render public and sacrilegious honors to a multitude of imaginary and fabulous divinities, and the only living and true God unknown among them, shuddered with a holy zeal, says the sacred historian; "His spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry;"* and all the power and majesty of the Areopagus did not prevent this great Apostle, though alone, unknown, without support, mean and abject in his appearance, from presenting himself before that grave and numerous assembly, to preach to them the God whom they knew not, and to represent the vanity and ridiculousness of the idols to which they raised such pompous altars. And though his zeal appeared but foolishness to the most of those false wise men, who were given up of God to a judicial blindness, yet the word of the gospel did not return to him void. Dionysius the Areopagite, Damaris, a holy woman, and many others, thankfully received the benefit of the light and of the truth which the Lord had caused to shine in the midst of their darkness.

Hear what the fire of divine love will produce in a minister of Christ when this love is truly master of his heart; a lively grief at seeing his Lord dishonored, and his holy law violated and despised by a great part of mankind; an ardent desire to avenge his glory, and secure to him the homage which is due to his supreme majesty and incomprehensible goodness; a holy engagedness to give up himself—to make his feeble talents useful—to sacrifice even his life, to form true worshippers of God—to manifest his name and his glory—and to inspire all men with the same sentiments of fear, love, and gratitude,

* Acts xvii. 16.

with which he himself is penetrated. We cannot love and be insensible to insults offered to the object of our love; we cannot be sensible of these without exerting all our talents to prevent or stop them, especially when, besides the obligation common to all men, our ministry makes this a peculiar and essential duty—a duty which constitutes the principal part of our calling, and which includes all other duties.

And though our zeal should not be successful, though the truths which we preach to sinners should fall upon hard and insensible hearts, we shall always have the consolation of having rendered glory to God, and of having exerted ourselves, as far as in us lay, to cause glory to be rendered to him by those who dishonor him. He does not always console his ministers with a sudden and visible success, lest man should attribute to himself a success owing only to divine grace; but his word is always secretly working; the holy seed, which appears to have fallen upon an unkind soil, is not however lost, and sooner or later it will bring forth fruit. God has his seasons, and it is not for us to mark them out to his power and wisdom. His Spirit works where it will, and when it will; we see the changes it produces, but the secret and wonderful ways by which it produces them are unknown: these are profound secrets of Providence, which will not be disclosed until the day of revelation. He demands of all, care, labor, culture; the increase he reserves to himself alone. He orders us to teach, to exhort, to reprove; not to retain the truth in unrighteousness; to cause it to sound in the ear; but it is for him alone to open for it an entrance to the heart.

But, my brethren, it is not a fear that the splendor of success will not accompany our labors which induces us to neglect them;—besides that this fear would be but a fear arising from pride and self-love, which instead of justifying us would render us still more culpable;—the true reason I have already mentioned;

it is that we are not interested either for the glory of God, or the salvation of men. And indeed, as an Apostle observes, how can we be interested for the glory of God whom we do not see, while we are insensible to the wants and to the ruin of our brethren whom we do see.* Can we behold those whom we love perishing, without emotion, and without running to their assistance; especially when we consider, that they are our brethren, over whom we are required to watch? Their salvation is, in a sense, connected with our cares; it is a precious deposit committed to us, for which a rigorous account will be exacted of us; and if they perish, their blood will be required at our hands.

Paul wished to be accursed for his brethren;† that is to say, he esteemed as nothing, his labors, his persecutions, his reproaches, every thing that he had endured for them; he was willing, had it been possible, even to suffer beyond this world, if their salvation required it. His consolations, his discouragements, his inquietudes, every thing which passed in his heart, had no other object but their perseverance and progress in the faith, which he had preached to them. His letters breathed an apostolical, lively, affecting, magnanimous tenderness. You are, said he to the Christian converts, the illustrious proofs of my apostleship; I am worthy of the glorious title of minister and apostle of our compassionate Redeemer, only so far as I suffer—as I expose myself to every evil, to hunger, to thirst, to nakedness, to the most frightful torments, to call you to the knowledge of the truth. And we, my brethren, are worthy of the respectable name of ministers of Christ, only so far as we love the people committed to our charge,—so far as we spare neither our cares, nor our pains, nor even life itself, to recover them from the empire of Satan.

* 1 John iv. 20. † Romans ix. 3.

We are, said an ancient Father, Vicars of the love of Jesus Christ; we succeed to the ardent love with which he was inflamed for men; he has established us its trustees; he perpetuates his priesthood in us only that he may therein perpetuate his love; that tender love which ran with so much eagerness after one single wandering sheep—that paternal love which received, with marks of joy, so sensible and so illustrious, the rebellious child who was lost and found again—that indefatigable love which induced him to disregard fatigue, nourishment, all his necessities, to instruct a woman of Samaria—that generous love which shed tears of sorrow over unfaithful Jerusalem, ready to perish without resource, for having refused to receive the peace and salvation which his goodness offered—in fine, that inextinguishable love which sighed for the baptism of blood, with which he was to be baptized on the cross, because that mankind would there find a remedy for all their evils, the price of their redemption, and their reconciliation with his Father.

Now do we feel even a single spark of that love in our hearts? Does the ruin of our brethren afflict us? Do we, like our Saviour, shed tears for that frightful dissoluteness of manners which prevails among all ranks? Alas! do we not listen without pain to the history of the most secret, the most afflicting, and the most shameful instances of iniquity? Does not the history of sins, of which the public is ignorant, excite rather our curiosity than our grief? The morals of the people become every day more corrupt, because the zeal of ministers becomes more remiss; a torrent of crimes and offences overwhelms the face of the earth, because there are few apostolical men to oppose, like a wall of brass, the frightful inundation. The greater part of sinners live tranquil in their sins, because they no more hear those thundering voices, animated by the Spirit of God, which only are capable of awakening them from their supineness. The

world, by having accustomed us to disorders and scandals, has made us insensible to them; we regard the mournful spectacle as an evil without remedy, which began with the world, and which will end but with the world; we think that the manners of the present day have been the manners of all ages; while we do not call to mind those happy times when a single prevaricator, in a numerous Church, was considered as a monster and a prodigy,—and when sins, which we consider as mere weaknesses, were punished by a separation from the assembly of the faithful. The truth is, my brethren, one great reason why Christianity became corrupted was the corruption, the want of zeal, and the indolence of the clergy. The Church would soon recover its former beauty, if we should embrace the faithful spirit of the primitive ministers of the gospel; every thing would change if we should change ourselves. The universality of vice, instead of justifying our unfaithfulness, witnesses against us, and renders us more criminal; it is owing to us that vice has become thus common, and infested so great a proportion of nominal Christians; it is the unfortunate fruit of our defection and remissness; how then can this become our justification and excuse?

Still, it is but too true, that the openness and frequency of transgressions are pleaded as an excuse to authorize our indifference to the salvation of our fellow men; and this is another source of the want of zeal.

But, in truth, this is but a cowardly timidity which dares not oppose common prejudices, and which regards the frivolous approbation of men rather than their serious and eternal interests; it is a criminal respect for men which renders us more attentive and more sensible to our own present interest and comfort, than to the glory of God; it is a carnal prudence which represents zeal and holy wisdom under false ideas of excess, indifference, and rashness: a new pretence which extinguishes all spirit of zeal in the heart of many ministers.

They honor their cowardice with the specious names of moderation and prudence; under a pretence that they must not carry their zeal too far, they have none at all; by wishing to avoid the rock of imprudence and over-engagedness, they often fall, without scruple, upon that of cowardice and indolence. They wish to be able to render themselves useful to sinners, and at the same time, render sinners favorable to them; that is to say, they wish to have their zeal applauded—to be able to oppose the passions of men, and at the same time, to secure their praises—to condemn the vices which others love, and to be approved of those whom they condemn. But is there any means of applying a caustic to a wound without exciting pain? No, my brethren, let us not deceive ourselves; if that apostolical zeal—that magnanimous, wise, disinterested zeal—that zeal which feared not formerly to say to an Emperor, "Imitate David in his repentance, as you have imitated him in his sins"*—if that zeal is so uncommon among us, it is because we regard ourselves alone, instead of seeking the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. Our views in entering into the ministry do not lead us to examine whether we shall be useful, but whether we shall be applauded; we esteem ourselves successful, no further than we acquire honor in the eyes of men. Whatever would subject us to mortifications and reproaches from them, although God should be glorified thereby, and his grace should make use of it to spread blessings upon our ministry, we avoid as a disappointment and an unhappiness; as if we were ministers for ourselves alone. Glory and infamy were regarded by the great Apostle to the Gentiles in the same light, when he was discharging the duties of his apostleship; he did not think it possible to please men, and be a true servant of Jesus Christ. But we would unite what that heavenly man thought

* St. Ambrose.

could not be united ;(though he learned, even in heaven, secrets which the ear has never heard. Let us not deceive ourselves ; the Son of God came not to send peace upon the earth, but a sword ; the truths of which we are the interpreters cannot please the world, because they condemn the world. If we expect that the gospel should be according to the taste of the world, and that the truth will find no gainsayers, we expect what Christ has foretold will never happen. The world will always remain, even to the end, inimical to him and his doctrine ; it will always reply to us as the Jews did to Christ, " this is a hard saying ;" these truths are extravagant ; these maxims are impracticable ; and it is not possible to hear them without revolting against them. " This is an hard saying ; Who can hear it ?"* The world will never change its language ; we must expect to find it always armed against us ; opposing the arms of flesh and blood to the spiritual armor of our holy warfare ; thwarting our projects ; rendering our labors abortive ; turning our doctrine into ridicule ; decrying our ministry ; and often attempting to injure our reputations with the poison of censure and calumny.

Why then should that which is to console us under our troubles, and crown our labors, become the only motive to give us a distaste for them ? Let us remember that success, in their ministry, was not promised to the Apostles, by their great Master, but in connection with contempt, opprobrium, contradiction, and sufferings. If they had had no other motive to induce them to preach the gospel but the expectation that cities and provinces would receive it with applause, the whole universe would have been still in idolatry ; and instead of true faith and holy doctrines, we should have received from our ancestors only blindness, profane superstition, and idolatry. It is the glorious characteristic of the doctrines of Chris-

* John vi. 60.

tianity, and a great proof of their divinity, to be always opposed and always victorious; to raise the world against them, and to subject the world to their yoke; to be opposed to flesh and blood, to pride, ambition, false wisdom, and all the passions of man; and to establish themselves alone, without strength, without support, without protection, by the arms of grace and truth, upon the ruins of all human lusts. To fear contradictions and obstacles, is then to be wanting in faith; since faith itself proposes them to us as the glory and recompense of our ministry.

Have not ministers, animated with the Spirit of God, experienced contradictions, in all ages? In succeeding to the zeal and ministry of the apostles, have they not succeeded to their tribulations and reproaches? It was not by temporizing with sinners that they converted them; it was by combatting them; it was not by flattering the great and the powerful, that they induced them to submit to the yoke of Christ; it was by making them tremble, as Paul formerly did even kings upon their thrones, by the terrors of the holy word—by the frightful image of a judgment to come, and of the punishments reserved for the worldly-minded and unchaste.

We however flatter ourselves with succeeding better by adopting another method towards the great and the powerful; and this is a perpetual illusion which conceals from us our prevarication and weakness. We hardly dare show them, even at a distance, truths which displease them, which yet alone can be useful to them. Their most public and most shameful vices are to us like sacred things; and we touch them only with circumspection, and with strokes so slight and tender that they are not perceived. Our great object seems to be, not to convert them, but to forbear irritating them; as if our ministry, as respects them, consisted in humoring them, not in converting them; and in preaching to them the words of salvation in such a manner, that

they cannot find any thing that regards and interests them. We persuade ourselves that we ought not, by an indiscreet zeal, to deprive the Church of worldly greatness which may be useful to it; as if the Church had need of an arm of flesh to support it; as if men, plunged in sin, could be useful in the work of God; as if it was necessary to flatter the great, for the maintenance of a religion which was at first established by combatting their passions; in fine, as if it was indiscreet not to use flattery and collusion in our ministry.

My brethren, let us not seek supports of flesh and blood for religion. Let us unite fidelity in our ministry with the respect and regard due to human greatness—what we owe to a love of the truth with a proper regard to the rules of Christian prudence. Religion does not authorize excesses and indiscretion in zeal; it condemns only a fear of man, and the cowardly and interested views of self-love. Let us respect the great and the powerful, but let us not respect their vices and their sins; let us render to their persons the love, the homage, and the regard which are due to them, but let us not render the same to their vices; let us exhibit to the common people examples of submission and fidelity to the great, not of adulation and shameful meanness. The men of the world study enough to corrupt and blind them by the poison of continual flattery; let us not prostitute our ministry to so unworthy a use; but, by a wise and respectable sincerity, let us preserve for them a resource for knowing the truth. If in consequence of our places and stations we have free access to them, let us not be occupied in advancing our own fortune, but their salvation. The only means of being useful to them is not to desire them to be useful to us. If we aspire at procuring their favor, we must begin by humoring their foibles. It is rare that their good graces are to be purchased but by weakness and base complaisance on our part. We should

tremble when they load us with favors; the higher they elevate us, the lower, we have reason to fear we are in reality degraded; their gifts cost us dear, since they must, almost always, be purchased at the expense of truth, and of the dignity of our ministry. Not that the great are unsusceptible of the truth; on the contrary, by their being the less accustomed to it, it would make the stronger impression. Their ruin generally proceeds from this source, that there is no person near them who dares to show them the precipice, and reach forth a hand to hinder them from falling into destruction.

It is then an improper respect for man which extinguishes in us sacerdotal zeal and a love of the truth. To this source of the want of zeal we may add another, which yet, I hope, will not apply to those who now hear me; I mean disorderly morals. It is not indeed to be wondered at, that a minister, whose soul is polluted with criminal passions, should find himself without strength, without emotion, without courage, when it is necessary for him to reprove and condemn the same passions in others. How can sins which we love, and which we ourselves practise, awaken zeal or regret in us? If we were capable of being affected by seeing them in others, we should first feel our own misery. Familiarized with iniquity, it becomes in others an object more suited to corrupt us than to give us pain; more adapted to excite our passions than to stimulate our zeal. The open transgressions which we witness are no longer any thing, in respects us, but inducements to impenitence; they justify, in our view, our secret sins; and that which ought to pierce the heart with the most lively grief, calms us, encourages us, and completes the extinction of every pious sentiment. So that if our stations then oblige us to preach the truths of salvation, and to speak against public vices, how cold, how constrained, how disconcerted our manner! My brethren, our reproofs ought not to

blush for our morals. A zeal disavowed by reproachable conduct is but a theatrical air, which has nothing serious in it, and is only a reproach to the ministerial office, and a scandal to religion. Such persons not only degrade the word of God in their own mouths, but they render suspicious and useless the zeal of truly holy ministers. For men of the world, who see in the latter, the same zeal that is manifested in the former, suppose that they have also the same vices; they persuade themselves that the zeal they behold is but artifice and ostentation; and they justify themselves in their irregularities, by appealing to the lives of those who condemn them. This is the constant burden of the libertine's song; in such impious language consists the wit of those satires and licentious poems with which the world is overspread. A public minister who, by his morals, contradicts the truths which he preaches, makes more infidels and libertines than all those frightful writings which impiety has produced, and which are spread in darkness; and he brands religion with a stigma which the zeal and piety of many holy ministers cannot efface. Zeal against vices is therefore unbecoming and unprofitable, except when connected with a holy and virtuous life. Admit that our sins are not known by the people, and that by our management we have saved them from this stumbling block; what words can a heart which is deceitful, corrupted, and embruted by the most shameful voluptuousness, furnish to recommend the truth, the modesty, the holiness, and the severity of the law? How can you, as an Apostle asks, preach against adulterers, fornicators, and those who commit sacrilege, when every thing you say on the subject may be turned against yourselves? Will not secret shame—the contradiction between your language and your conduct—the false part which you are acting, will not all these even dry up the words in your mouths? And can you sustain an office so disagreeable and so reproachful?

Though you should carry your artifice and dissimulation so far, as to put on all the externals of zeal, what fruit could result from it to your fellow men? It is in vain that any attempt to cover their sins; the semblances of piety which they assume always appear forced and unnatural, as not coming from the heart; the appearance strikes the eye in vain; a secret unction is wanted, and nothing goes to the heart. Such persons may cry aloud, they may appear warm and earnest; but they only are warm; the hearer remains cold; the heart only can speak to the heart; the vehement language of zeal may be counterfeited; but zeal alone can imitate itself.

Again, what blessings can he expect to draw down upon his ministry, who is himself pronounced accursed? Can he who, like another Lazarus, remains a noisome carcase in the horror and infection of death, be a proper instrument, in the hands of God, to give life and salvation to others? Will the Holy Ghost speak by a mouth repeatedly stained with the language of passion, obscenity, or vice? Will he carry on the work of holiness and sanctification by a wicked and hypocritical workman? Will he add his grace and blessing to labors which dishonor him, and which are a crime and a profanation in his eyes? And will he employ a reprobate and sacrilegious minister in forming his elect and his saints?

But, my brethren, how is it possible that an openly wicked and immoral minister should not be incapable of zeal, when even lukewarmness, with morals otherwise regular, opposes an invincible obstacle? A new source of want of zeal.

It is not that frighful state of sin, mentioned above which is most to be feared. This is the character of but a small number, who are given up to a reprobate mind, and in whom every principle of piety and of the fear of God appears extinguished. God does not often permit such gross offences. But what you have to guard against is that state of lukewarm-

ness and negligence, in your labors, which prevents all their fruit. And indeed, how is it possible that you should present yourselves before your people, as if animated with that divine fire which communicates the sparks of grace to the most cold and insensible hearts, when in reality you have no ardent desire either for your own salvation, or for the salvation of others? If you attend to the duties of your office, merely from habit, and with that air of weariness and repugnance which is inseparable from a lukewarm and unfaithful course of life, you will leave the same dispositions in those who hear you; your labors will awaken neither your faith nor your piety, and they will leave the same asleep in your hearers.—Alas! a holy and fervent minister needs a wonderful measure of zeal, application, patience, and labor, in order to combat all those obstacles which the world, the devil, and the corruption of modern manners oppose to the success of his ministry; and often, notwithstanding the ardor of his zeal, and his uninterrupted attentions, he has the grief to see his labors unprofitable. What then can a slack and indolent laborer promise himself from his negligence and indolence? What fruit can he expect from a field which he cultivates only with a feeble and languishing hand, and which he seems to consider as entrusted to him only to serve as a place for repose, rather than to be the object of his continual care and attention?

If a common Christian, who lives in lukewarmness is unfit for the kingdom of God, for what is a priest fit who does the work of God negligently? What an object of disgust to a God jealous of his gifts? What an afflicting spectacle to the Church to see an office which requires zeal and labor, exercised by a lukewarm and indolent minister, instead of a faithful workman, who would enlarge the kingdom of the Redeemer, turn many sinners from their evil ways, edify the faithful, and contribute to their consolation and glory! A lukewarm and unfaithful course of life is

then extremely incompatible with the spirit of the ministry.

To conclude, let us review these several sources of a want of zeal in ministers; they cannot be too often placed before our eyes. First, a state of ease and affluence; as if indigence and not charity was to furnish the Church with ministers, and the people with teachers. Secondly, a want of love to God; this must be wholly extinguished in our hearts, if we can remain tranquil and insensible to sins which are daily committed before our eyes, and which are an affront to God. Thirdly, a want of benevolence to our fellow men; can we love them, and at the same time see them perishing, without having the prospect of their eternal ruin awaken in us the least desire to be useful to them? Fourthly, a respect for men; which leads us to seek their esteem and friendship at the expense of truth; a cowardice which ties the tongue and makes us prefer our own glory and our own interests, to the glory of God. Courage, disinterestedness, a holy generosity, a wise and heroic firmness, are the effects of true, sacerdotal grace; and if these are effaced from the heart, the grace of our calling is also extinguished. Fifthly, a wicked life; what zeal against the vices of others can he feel, who is unaffected with his own sins? Sixthly, a lukewarm and unfaithful course of life; zeal is a holy fervor which leads a person to attend first to his own sins; he who pardons himself for almost every thing will very slightly reprove others.

Remove then, O God! from the hearts of thy ministers, all the obstacles which the world, and the flesh incessantly oppose to true zeal; inflame them with that spirit of fire and wisdom, which thou didst shed upon the first disciples; raise up a succession of laborers powerful in word and deed, whom the

world cannot intimidate ; whom all the powers of the earth cannot shake ; whom no worldly interests can effect ; all whose steps shall be regulated and animated solely by a regard to thy glory and the salvation of sinners ; and who shall consider the approbation of men as nothing, any further than it contributes to bring glory to thee in all ages ! Amen.

Sermon II.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE MINISTERIAL ZEAL. A SERMON PREACHED TO A SYNOD.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

ROMANS X. 2.

——— *They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.*

I LATELY discoursed to you, my brethren,* upon the necessity of zeal in ministers; and endeavored to convince you, that zeal against vices and scandals is a duty essentially binding upon Christian ministers. But as there is a zeal according to knowledge, and a zeal of ignorance and rashness, it is important to distinguish them by their proper characters, and by laying before you what is necessary to render zeal beneficial, to guard you at the same time, against a false zeal which can produce no good fruits.

Now, as the zeal which ministers ought to possess is nothing but that charity, which implies not only a sincere desire that sinners may be saved, but also a lively and eager wish to labor for their salvation, to know whether our zeal is true, we have but to examine, whether we can apply to it those characters

* See the preceding Sermon.

which St. Paul represents as inseparable from charity. For whatever zeal does not resemble charity, and is not indeed active, compassionate, humble, mild, patient, and disinterested, is not that zeal which is according to knowledge,—that zeal which honors the ministry, and which Christ requires in his ministers.

I know that zeal, though the fruit of the divine Spirit in all who possess it, assumes different appearances, according to the different natural tempers of those whose hearts it inflames. In some it is more pleasing and insinuating; and in others more terrible and menacing. But notwithstanding this diversity, charity is a fixed point to which it is directed in all: these are but different ways which lead to the same end, and which are all enstamped with the mark of the divine principle from which they proceed. Every one has his peculiar gift and talent; but as it is charity which forms them all, there is no one which is not marked with its indelible traits. Let us then consider some of the characteristics of charity, as they are represented by the Apostle Paul, in the thirteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, for they are the same which distinguish true zeal.

1. Zeal formed by charity is long-suffering.—"Charity suffereth long." First characteristic.

Yes, my brethren, whatever desire we may have for the salvation of sinners, we ought to wish and expect it only according to the appointment of God. In consequence of secret pride, many grow weary and discouraged, if their labors are not crowned with immediate success; they wish to make the grace of the Spirit subservient to their own glory; in discharging their functions they seek for that applause of men which follows those sudden and visible blessings with which God is sometimes pleased to accompany the labors of his servants. As soon as this

support fails, their zeal which was the effect of pride rather than of charity, is weakened, if not extinguished; the work of the ministry becomes disgusting and insipid; and they think themselves unprofitable, because their self-love is no longer gratified according to their wishes.

Sometimes we ascribe it to the hardness of sinners, that the holy word meets with so little success. In consequence of their inattention to the truth, we believe them unworthy of our cares; it is no more but with regret that we bestow any pains upon them; their insensibility excites our murmurs and complaints, rather than our pity and charity; we grow cold with regard to them, in proportion as their necessities ought to render us more tender and more disposed to help them. Instead of viewing their obduracy with a tranquil eye, it should excite our compassion; and it should increase our cares and zeal, instead of lessening them.

We frequently see ministers who complain of the inattention of their people, and who speak of this too much to men and not enough to God. Their impatience proceeds from pride and self-love. If actuated by no better zeal than this, we shall wish to succeed in our labors, merely because success flatters us; we shall attribute our success to ourselves and feel irritated against those who deprive us of this satisfaction. We shall think they take from us a glory which was our due, and that they refuse an attention to our instructions which our vanity prompted us to believe we had a right to expect from them. In consequence of this we shall despise them; and give them up, almost with pleasure, to their hard hearts; we shall revenge ourselves for their insensibility by feeling an indifference with regard to them; and appear as little affected with their miseries, as they are with our preaching.

But, my brethren, the zeal which springs from charity disposes him who possesses it to "reprove,

rebuke, exhort;" his patience increases with the progress of vice, and to new obstacles he opposes only the patience which produces hope; that is to say, new cares and new instructions, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." He expects success from God only; his tears, his sighs, his prayers incessantly solicit this; the longer God seems to defer it, the more he strives to obtain it, by redoubling his labors and his prayers; the little success of his ministry he attributes to himself alone, to his secret sins, to his want of faith, and to the imperfections attending his labors.

Those pastors to whom God refuses a visible success in their ministry ought to feel the disposition expressed by the disciples of Christ, when they had been fishing all night without success. "Lord," said they to their Master, "we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word we will let down the net."* The following is the language of true zeal, which charity always renders patient: "Lord! unto this time all my attentions to the people, whom thou hast deigned to commit to my care, have produced no effect; their hardness seems to increase with my labors; I cease not to cast in my net, but it always returns to me empty, and I have not the consolation of having drawn one soul from the deep waters, from the abyss of iniquity. However, thou commandest me still to labor, and not to be weary; thou wilt that I imitate thy patience and paternal goodness, which are never weary of knocking at the door of a rebellious heart, and which after having been repeatedly driven back from it return again with new eagerness. With this consoling example before me, I will not abandon the holy work; thou appointest me to it, and thy commands are always a sure indication of success; thou grantest it when thou pleasest, and our impatience, instead of

* Luke v. 5.

hastening, retards it. Thou art displeased that man should wish to anticipate the secret and adorable order of the dispensation of thy grace; thou wilt that we realize that the bestowment of it is not with us—that he who waters is nothing—that the increase is wholly from thee—and that to change the heart is the work of thy grace and thy power.

Thus the first mark of true zeal is to be long-suffering.

2. From this springs kindness; the second characteristic of zeal formed by charity. "Charity—is kind."

The kindness which the Apostle places among the characteristics of true zeal is not that softness, that pusillanimity, that over-strained benignity, which would render us so obliging and complaisant to our fellow men—so attentive to refrain from every thing calculated to make them melancholy—so eager to conciliate their affections, and make them pleased with us—so careful to speak to them only the language of peace, confidence, and mercy, that instead of frightening them, on account of their sins, we should encourage them, and in our mildness furnish them with a resource against the secret alarms of conscience. This fault may proceed from two sources; either from a natural weakness and timidity of character, or from an ignorance of the strictness and severity of those rules which are the standard of our duty; either our good nature does not permit us to use the light we enjoy, or our light itself is false and drawn from erroneous sources. In the first rank we must place certain ministers who, though well instructed, enlightened, and fully acquainted with the pure maxims of Christian holiness, are so incapable, in consequence of a natural weakness of character, of any thing firm, great, and noble, that they have not force of mind enough to say to a sinner, "Thou art the man." It seems they fear they should afflict

him were they to expose to him all the horror of his situation; they are always sons of consolation, never sons of thunder. This is not what the Apostle calls the kindness of zeal and charity; it is rather a meanness which cannot be excited and elevated to any thing noble; and which the great interests of the glory of God and the salvation of men leave as indifferent and unaffected as they found it. It is a timid and indolent disposition, which leads a person to fear equally whatever would disturb his own repose, or trouble that of others; and which makes his corrections and instructions always bear the soft and easy marks of his natural temper. This does not at all resemble that kindness which is the fruit of the holy spirit; it is merely the effect of natural constitution.

We should mistake still more were we to confound the holy kindness of which we speak with that soft complaisance which, by the aid of false science, substitutes erroneous rules of conduct in place of the strict precepts of the gospel; and which prefers the opinions of men of the world to the maxims of Christ. This complaisance is a cruel kindness, which kills instead of curing; it is a dark science which seeks rather to palliate crimes than to correct them; and which, under a pretence of not driving sinners to despair, authorizes them to hope against hope. It is an unhappy refinement of these latter times, which, unable to reconcile the severity of ancient rules with the corruption of modern manners, has led many to persuade themselves they have found new directions, more favorable to the passions, and more conformable to the manners of the age. Thus the standard of duty, which is immutable, has been changed, in proportion as morals have changed; and the precepts of the gospel have been reconciled with the maxims of the world, although the gospel pronounces an anathema against the world. That mildness then which tends only to justify men in their sins is very different from Christian charity. To flatter men

in their sins is not to love them; it is to disguise and sweeten a poison for them, to the end that they may swallow it without fear; it is to leave at the bottom of their hearts a putrifying ulcer, and to apply only softening and palliative remedies, which do not prevent the evil from increasing, and only remove from the patient all anxiety concerning himself.

On the other hand, we must equally avoid that extravagant severity which tends only to lead sinners to despair of mercy,—that zeal which, always armed with terror and rigor, leads its possessors to forget that Christ came not to call the righteous but the wicked; and that it was not by such severity that he drew to him publicans and sinners. Zeal should be so wisely directed that the sinner may be neither flattered, nor discouraged; that he may feel the real danger of his situation, and not despair of a remedy; in one word, that he may be made to know what he owes to God, and, under a lively sense of his own insufficiency, be induced to apply to Christ for salvation.

A truly charitable zeal assumes different forms, according to the different characters of men. Sometimes it threatens, it frightens, it exhibits only terrible and distressing objects; at other times, it consoles, it encourages the desponding, it calms the fearful. But it is always the kindness of true charity which furnishes it with expressions either of consolation or of terror—which borrows sometimes the arms of holy indignation, and sometimes those of tenderness. It disavows the violence, the haughtiness, the hardness which are sometimes honored with the name of zeal, but which are only sallies of human passion. The zeal which seeks to ruin sinners, to dishonor them, and to publish the faults it cannot correct, is not the zeal which springs from charity; for charity derives from the sins of men a subject of secret lamentation, not of public declamation and censure; it seeks not to cover the wicked with shame

before men, but to inspire them with that secret confusion, which will lead them to repent before God; and whatever tends to disgust sinners and injure their reputation is foreign from that true zeal of which charity is the principle.

It often happens, that under a false pretence of zeal, some think themselves authorized to say every thing against hardened and obstinate sinners. They give way to the impetuosity of a violent natural temper; they declaim against individuals in public conversation; they almost point them out with the finger, in their public discourses; they characterise them by such pointed and striking traits that nobody can mistake them; and then applaud themselves; as if a minister of love and reconciliation could become, without profanation, a public minister of animosity and censure.

Ministers cannot be too much on their guard against these excesses. By giving way to them, they render their ministry not only unprofitable but odious; because to the aversion which the wicked naturally have for religion they add a hatred of those who preach it to them. By this means sinners are exasperated; they show resentment and manifest a secret pleasure in defying and vexing those who publicly censure and condemn them.

But true zeal secures the respect even of those whom it reproves and condemns; if it does not restrain the wicked from sin, it at least makes them in their understandings, approve of virtue. He who is actuated by this is so tenderly affected with the situation of his fellow men, who are exposed to ruin, that he tries by the tenderest methods to attract and allure them to attend to the salvation of their souls; and if he sometimes goes to excess, it is an excess of mildness and tenderness, not of rigor and hardness. If his success does not correspond to his cares and attentions, his tears and sighs are the only revenge which he takes for the ingratitude of sinners; his

love for them increases even with their sins; the nigher he sees them to destruction, the more is his tenderness alarmed and awakened; he never loses sight of them; their danger excites his compassion, their continued obduracy under his instructions awakens emotions of pity, not of resentment; and it is never passion and chagrin, but love alone which dictates his remonstrances. It is hardly possible but that a pastor of this character will find the hearts of people sensibly affected with his cares and tenderness; and have the consolation of seeing his ministry and labors crowned with success. Such is the kindness of that zeal which springs from charity.

3. But, thirdly, that zeal which is the fruit of charity will not only prevent all that severity and hardness in our remonstrances, which are the effect of ill nature and impetuosity of temper; and all that impatience and discouragement which the hardness of sinners, and the unprofitableness of our labors, with regard to them, are calculated to produce; but further, it will cause us to behold with pleasure, and without jealousy, the zeal and labors of our brethren in the ministry, accompanied with more success, and with more blessings, than ours. "Charity—envieth not."

That low jealousy which induces any to envy the success of others, is wholly incompatible with true zeal. It is a shameful disposition, which causes those who possess it to be afflicted even with the conversion of sinners, the progress of the gospel, the glory of Jesus Christ and his grace, when it is by the ministry of another that God works these wonders. It is not a wish to promote the salvation of their fellow men that actuates such persons; it is the vain honor of being themselves the instruments and ministers of this. The glory of God does not interest them any further than they find their own glory connected with his. How different from this was the Apostle

Paul? Provided that Christ was preached, he rejoiced to see the gospel flourish, even by the ministry of those who sought to lessen him in the esteem of Christians. Moses also wished that all his brethren might receive the spirit of prophecy, and all the other miraculous gifts with which the Lord had favored him. And shall we, my brethren, desire to be alone,—to divide the glory and success of the holy ministry with no one?

This spirit of jealousy among ministers is a great evil in the Church; and it is an evil of long standing. Alas! even at the commencement of the preaching of the gospel, this spirit appeared. Jealousy added new rigors to the sufferings of the great Apostle; and the splendid and immense successes of his apostleship induced some to view, with delight, those successes stopped by his bonds. Is it then astonishing that this evil which showed itself in the midst of those prodigies of zeal, of holiness, of disinterestedness, of charity, of patience, which then honored the ministry, should appear in the midst of the corruption of modern manners? People hide it from themselves; but it spreads abroad fruits so much the more bitter, as its root is more deeply concealed in the heart; it is disguised under the specious names of zeal and charity; but what zeal is that which the increase of the glory of God and the knowledge of his name fills with sorrow and regret?

This, however, is a scandal which exists in the Church; it is a kind of abomination in the holy place. The similar employments of ministers ought to unite them, but they are sometimes found to divide them. Those who ought to be united in the strongest bonds of affection look on each other with a jealous eye; they mutually lessen and undervalue the talents and successes of one another. When the successes of their brethren are spoken of, they ascribe it to a popular prejudice in their favor; they hear praises bestowed on others with an air which

disowns them; and are hardly willing to acknowledge any thing to be good but what they themselves have done. The scandal of which I speak goes still further. Ministers revile each other; they accuse each other of excesses, either of severity or relaxation, equally opposed to the holy wisdom of the gospel; a ministry of peace becomes a source of war and dissention; pastors diffuse among the people a spirit of division; the prejudices and jealousies of teachers descend to their disciples; some belong to Cephas, and others to Paul, and this so effectually that no one belongs to Christ. What a subject this of affliction to the Church, and of triumph to her enemies! O my God! when shall these days of trouble and contention end? when shall we all, united in the same spirit of peace, and in a desire to promote thy glory, offer to thee our united labors and prayers for the salvation of sinners?

Indeed, my brethren, he who has true zeal beholds, with transports of joy, the work of the gospel flourishing in the hands of any of its ministers: provided Christ is preached with success his desires are satisfied. He is even disposed to think others better fitted than himself, to be instruments of good to sinners, in the hands of a merciful God, because he does not believe them so sinful as himself. He is willing, like the fore-runner of the Messiah, to decrease, to be neglected and forgotten, provided that others may increase, and cause the gospel to flourish. The success of another inspires him with more lively and more pure joy, than his own success; because he has no reason to fear, that his joy, in the former case, proceeds from secret pride, and from motives merely selfish. Nothing grieves him so much as to see that the harvest is great, and that there are but few laborers properly qualified to be employed with success. His prayers are therefore continually ascending to the throne of grace to solicit the Lord of the harvest to raise up suitable laborers; and when

God in mercy deigns to raise up any, and to endow them with excellent gifts, he blesses the Father of lights and the giver of every good gift. His joy, his love for the Church, his ardent desires for the conversion of sinners, lead him to participate, beforehand, in all those blessings which God is about to work by the ministry of those chosen men. Whatever honors the Church he esteems as honorable to himself; and by this he shows that nothing is more noble and more worthy of religion, than zeal animated by charity, and, on the contrary, that nothing is so low, so contemptible, and so reproachful to the ministry, as a zeal stained and disgraced by jealousy.

4. But it will be of little avail to preserve our zeal from the poison of jealousy, if we are not, at the same time, on our guard against rashness and imprudence. Therefore, in the fourth place, the zeal of charity is not rash, and does not labor in vain. Now, to labor in vain is to have no regard either to times, or places, or persons or manners, or to any of those considerations with which the success of zeal is commonly connected. "Charity vaunteth not itself."*

Zeal is a wise and enlightened charity; it is a holy desire to become useful; but at the same time a desire connected with light and prudence, which may direct us in the choice of means. Whatever appears excellent is not for that reason always proper; whatever is lawful is not always expedient. The hearts of most men, my brethren, are so corrupt, so full of

* The Vulgate Bible, from which the author made his quotations, translates the Greek verb here used *non agit perperam*. "The original signifies *rash and inconsiderate*; so that the "word must here import one that acts with such precipitancy and inconsideration as pride and ill nature often hurry "people into; which charity would preserve them from, "and induce that tenderness and caution which engage us "to look about us, that we may do ourselves and others "no harm." Doddridge Note *in loc.*

pride, malignity and perverseness, and naturally so averse to the rules of the gospel and to duty, that the slightest impropriety on our part, when we labor to bring the wicked to a sense of their duty, leads them to depart further from it. It is therefore necessary to smooth the way before them; for it is enough for them to have to combat with their perverse inclinations, without being obliged to bear with our rashness and imprudence. If therefore you foresee, that your zeal will irritate, instead of exciting to repentance, wait till the Lord furnishes you with a more favorable opportunity; do not expose the truth to contempt and derision; do not seek to unburden yourselves of your zeal, as of an oppressive load, without considering whether the place, where you aim to deposit it, is disposed to receive it. Without this precaution you will seem to seek to relieve your own impatience, rather than the miseries of your fellow men.

The Apostle, it is true, directs us to reprove, "in season and out of season." That is to say, the resistance and obduracy of sinners must not be suffered to discourage us; and the unprofitableness of our labors, and our want of success, must not induce us to abandon the holy functions of the ministry. When a disorder is gaining fast upon a sick person, it will not do to regard his repugnance; there is not a moment to be lost in checking the malady. Sometimes there is a necessity for excesses which may appear imprudent in the eyes of the false wise men of this world; but they are excesses which charity requires, which the command of God authorizes, and which are proved to be wise by the consoling and unexpected success attending them. This is what the Apostle calls reproving "in season and out of season." But he does not say, that the zeal, whose wise moderation he so much recommends, should lead us to dispense with the rules of Christian prudence; and that a pretended holiness of intention will excuse ir-

regularity and rashness in our actions. There is a decent and prudent regard to circumstances, with which zeal can never dispense; it regulates its instructions according to the character of the hearers; it seeks those moments when it can speak usefully and to the purpose; it does not hasten corrections, which patience and forbearance would render more efficacious; its great object is to be useful; and that same charitable zeal which inspires this holy desire is always ingenious in furnishing expedients which insure its success.

We frequently see ministers, whom an inconsiderate zeal subjects to many inconveniences, which are directly calculated to destroy all the fruit of their labors, and even to bring disgrace upon their characters. They undertake every thing; whatever has the appearance of good animates them, and puts them in motion; nothing appears to them impossible, and nothing seems to them in the place where it should be; they wish to change every thing, to displace every thing; they begin by introducing universal confusion, under a pretence of establishing order. Unquiet, rash, bold, narrow-minded,—provided they are violently engaged in any pursuit, they are satisfied with themselves, and think they are acting right; they rashly and inconsiderately undertake things, which require the most delicate management, which may lead to great and important events, and to which the most consummate prudence and skill are hardly competent; and when they leave one such undertaking, in which they have injured themselves, and brought a reproach upon the ministry, with the same hastiness, they attempt another enterprise, equally dangerous, and which promises no less confusion. These same persons are, however, in other respects, edifying, laborious, and irreproachable ministers, whom piety itself leads to such excesses.

And it is the more unhappy, that of those ministers, who might successfully serve the cause of religion by

their talents, and the holiness of their lives, there should still be found some whom indiscretion and rashness render useless, and sometimes even injurious. For if the irregularity of their zeal affected themselves only, and did nothing more than destroy the fruit of their own labors, the success attending wise and prudent ministers might afford some consolation for the unprofitableness of the former. But that which may justly excite grief is, that imprudent zeal discredits, in the opinion of men of the world, the wisest and the most cautious zeal. If one minister, in attempting to remedy vices and scandals, has given way to excesses, which bring upon him derision and censure, this is sufficient to render the zeal of the most prudent ridiculous and contemptible, in the view of sinners. The world is delighted to be able to persuade itself, that no one can condemn it, without going to extremities which are repugnant to good sense; it then exclaims, that there is nothing but a ridiculous weakness of mind, in our invectives against vice; it triumphs when it sees the sublime doctrines of the gospel, whose wisdom we so much boast of, disfigured by the improper conduct of its ministers. It is in vain that we present ourselves before it, with the weapons of moderation and Christian prudence; the doctrine which we preach excites contempt or ridicule; the world no longer acknowledges any thing serious and wise in the most important truths, truths so important that every thing else is vanity and folly; and confounding religion with the persons who preach it, it makes of both a subject of censure and reproach.

Such are the evils of an indiscreet and misplaced zeal. We ought to treat divine truths with circumspection and reverence. We may expose our property, our health, or our lives, for the salvation of our fellow men, and for the glory of the Lord, whose ministers we are; but we may not expose his glory, which is, in some degree, intrusted to us. Let us re-

member, that inconsiderate zeal occasions the holy name of God to be blasphemed; for the wicked pretend to believe that this is authorized by religion, and to that they charge the imprudence of ministers; they pursuade themselves, that the morality of Jesus Christ is extravagant and excessive; and that a system, whose teachers are so imprudent and foolish in their view, can have no adherents but such as resemble them.

5. But, my brethren, jealousy and rashness in zeal are commonly the consequences and the baneful fruits of pride. Therefore the Apostle, in order entirely to banish these two evils from zeal, adds, in the fifth place, that our zeal must be free from pride. "Charity—is not puffed up."

A truly zealous minister "is not puffed up" in consequence either of his own splendid talents and success, or of the indifferent talents and success of others; either of the vain praises of men, or of their censures; either of the favor of the great, or of their persecution and contempt. The poisonous influence of pride finds all the avenues of his heart shut against it by charity, and it cannot infect this gift of God. The zeal of charity attributes nothing to itself; its first effect is to annihilate in those who possess it, all regard to themselves—to establish a holy love in the soul, upon the ruins of self-love—to make this love reign there as a sovereign—to efface the man and put God in his place; so that then, united to God, they see God only, they act but for God, they have no joy, no grief, no pleasure, but in relation to God alone.

I say, the man of true zeal is not puffed up with his talents. He received them from God; how then should he be elevated with gifts which are not his, which originate not from him, and which are not given him but for the benefit of others?—with gifts which add nothing to his own virtue, and which will

only expose him to be called to a more strict account, for the use he makes of them? Neither is he puffed up with his successes; for it is God alone who produces fruit from his labors, in the hearts of sinners.

How uncommon is it, however, to find those who are not dazzled with the splendor of success? "Rejoice not," said Christ to his diciples, "that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."* Alas! it is but too true, that we are apt to applaud ourselves, for the success attending our ministry, which indeed is not ours to boast of; while we remain unaffected with that unfaithfulness which is justly chargeable to us, and which, though we may be instrumental in causing the names of others to be written in the book of life, will perhaps prevent our own from being inscribed there. What success can ever equal that of the Apostle Paul? How many towns, how many provinces, how many whole nations were called to the knowledge of a Saviour by his ministry? How many flourishing churches were established by his diligent labors? And yet he feared, that while he was laboring to instruct others, and to bring them under subjection to Jesus Christ, he himself should be cast away.† His great success alarmed him, instead of encouraging him; he did not, in consequence of it, give honor to himself; for he has told us, that he who plants and he who waters are nothing; and he feared that the gifts of God would make him forget the weakness and the impotence of man.

A truly zealous minister is not then puffed up, either with his talents, or with the most splendid success; neither is he puffed up in consequence of the indifferent talents and success of his brethren. He believes that God may refuse them these external gifts, only for the purpose of enriching them, more abundantly, with those internal gifts which alone

* Luke x. 20. † 1 Corinth. ix. 27.

are truly valuable. Instead therefore of elevating himself above them, by secret comparisons, prompted by pride, he respects them for their great holiness and righteousness; whilst he considers himself only as a canal, which is often empty, after having enriched the earth and the fields with its waters. No, my brethren, great talents do not always suppose the greatest virtues in their possessors; they render them more useful to men, but they do not always render them more acceptable to God; they advance his work in others, but often retard it in themselves. God, in his wisdom, sometimes employs instruments in carrying on his work, which he rejects, after having made use of them, and which he had destined only for this service. It is not what the Lord operates by us that should encourage us; it is only what he operates in us. Though we should speak the language of Angels, we may in the view of God, be but as sounding brass. And it may even be said, that the righteous dispenser of gifts and graces has so managed the distribution of them, that those whom he appears to favor the most with splendid external talents, are not commonly those on whom he bestows, most abundantly, the internal and secret riches of grace; and on the contrary, he seems to compensate those, to whom he refuses those splendid gifts, by an abundance of holiness, known to himself alone, and far more worthy of being admired than that vain popularity which draws upon some the applauses of men; but which, for that very reason, often leaves them more destitute of real grace, and more full of themselves, in the view of God.

Neither, finally, is a minister who is actuated by true zeal puffed up, in consequence of the praises or the contempt, the favor or the contradiction of men. As in his labors, he has no object in view but the salvation of his fellow men, he feels neither joy, chagrin, fear, nor hope, but in relation to that object; whatever does not evidence to him this only desireable fruit

of his labors interests him not; the praises of men, as they are no proof of their return to God, are to him but like the noise of children. He knows that these applauses have their origin only in the pride, the prejudices, or the inconstancy of men; that to-morrow the same persons will tread under foot the idol which they worship to-day; that they bestow praise rather to secure honor to themselves, than to do honor to religion; that the inconsistency of their approbation, and the little solidity there is in it, take from it whatever could gratify even pride; that they often envy and despise in secret those whom they seem to admire in public; and that their hearts rarely ratify the praises of their mouths.

The zeal of charity will not then be puffed up by praises; neither, on the other hand, will it be elevated by contempt and persecutions. It is indeed true, that these are promised to piety, and proposed as the glory and recompense of the ministry; and therefore when any one receives these from men, he may perhaps think that he has a right to believe himself marked with the seal of the apostleship.—Thus some applaud themselves for the contradictions they meet with, as if this were an honor inseparable from the preaching of the gospel; they believe themselve partakers of the zeal of primitive, apostolical men, because they suffer similar tribulations; and they persuade themselves that they have certainly fulfilled their ministry, to the divine acceptance, if, in discharging its duties, they have experienced contempt and bad treatment from the world.

But let me ask such persons, how do you know, that you do not owe to your own imprudence, rather than to the malice of men, the contradictions which you experience from them? Have not humor, rashness, and indiscretion taken from your zeal every thing truly respectable, and caused that contempt and persecution to fall on yourselves alone, which, with self-satisfaction, you attribute to your ministry?

Is it not an indiscreet or indecent manner of preaching the truth which has rendered it odious or ridiculous in your mouths? To glory in such contradictions is often to glory in the abuse which you have made of your ministry. Therefore, my brethren, neither the praises nor contempt of men ought to flatter our pride: their praises, because they are not due to us; their contempt, because we often merit it.

Let us add nothing of our own to our zeal; let us not mingle with it the faults of man; and then though the truths which we preach may cause the passions of the wicked to rise against them, yet they will secure respect even from those who are governed by their passions. Their corrupt hearts may reject them, may in appearance despise them; but their reason and their conscience will render secret homage to them: they may pretend to glory in condemning us, in treating us as extravagant declaimers; but inwardly they will justify us and condemn themselves. Such is the zeal of charity; "it is not puffed up;" nothing makes him who possesses it proud, because whatever there is of his own in his labors, which alone could inspire pride, is precisely what humbles him.

6. Another characteristic of zeal animated by charity is, that it does not seek its own interest. "Charity—seeketh not her own."

A zealous, faithful minister proposes to himself to labor only for his great Master, according to his command, and under his direction. He knows that the Spirit, like the wind, "bloweth where it listeth;" that there are diversities of gifts; and that those who are the most applauded are not always the most useful. He remembers, that as he is consecrated to the work of the ministry, his gifts and his talents are no longer his own; and that they ought to be wholly devoted to the service of his fellow men. Therefore, provided he consecrates to their salvation his cares,

his labors, and his watchings, he believes he accomplishes the designs of God respecting him. He does not even pretend to choose that kind of ministerial labor which is most conformed to his own taste, but gives himself up to that which the great head of the Church assigns to him ; he regards neither its advantages nor its inconveniences ; for what relates to himself alone is esteemed as nothing in services, which ought to be wholly for the glory of God and the good of mankind. He considers himself as an instrument in the hands of God, ready for any work, to which he may be called, either to lay the foundation, or to erect and adorn the superstructure ; in a word, as having no other destination than that assigned him by the call of Providence. Ready to be employed in the most obscure as well as in the most splendid services, his only glory is that God may be honored, and that himself may be forgotten.

Behold, my brethren, the main point and spirit of true zeal ; a universal disregard to every thing which relates to ourselves alone ; that is to say, not only to our own glory and convenience, but to our taste, our prejudices, and our particular views. We often wish to choose employments for ourselves which God has not destined for us ; we consider the inclination which governs us as coming from on high ; and the disgust —the repugnance which we feel for other employments appears to us a sufficient reason for declining to engage in them. But we should remember that we do not send forth ourselves ; and that the services which are most disagreeable to us, rather than such as are conformed to our taste, may often be those to which God in reality calls us.

Moses felt in himself an extreme reluctance to the service to which God called him, in directing him to lead forth his people from Egypt. His mildness, his timidity, his slowness of speech appeared to him sufficient reasons for excusing himself, from going to deliver to Pharaoh a message from the Lord ; and

to order him in the name of Jehovah, to permit the children of Israel to go out of Egypt; and the reluctance of this servant of God was the stronger, as his reasons for it were founded on a difficulty of speech, and on fears arising from that circumstance. However, at the command of God, he gave up his opposition, and his wonderful success was at once an illustrious proof of his mission, and a recompense for his submission and sacrifice. The history of the saints furnishes us with many similar examples; but it is to be feared that of those who devote themselves to the holy ministry, many require something, relating merely to themselves, to indemnify them for their pains; if it is not glory, or interest, it is taste.

We are not, however, to conclude, that it is necessary for us to interdict ourselves all those employments for which we may feel an inclination; nor is a taste for any particular employment to be considered as a sufficient reason for our not engaging in it; this would be a still more dangerous illusion. Talents for a certain service are often manifested by a taste for that service; but this alone ought not to determine our choice; its decision is always suspicious; and if it would be wrong wholly to disregard our own inclination, it is no less so to listen to that alone.

7. The zeal of charity then does not seek its own; it does not propose to itself any worldly consolations; neither is it irritated by opposition, or by any worldly inconveniences and troubles. "Charity—is not easily provoked."

The truth of which we are preachers is opposed to the world—to that world which Jesus Christ reproved; and the world is a most implacable enemy to the truth. These are two powers, says St. Austin, which mutually labor to destroy each other; the truth carries on a continual warfare against the world, and the world collects all its most dangerous and

violent shafts against the truth. This is the war which Christ came to send upon the earth. Those, therefore, who are appointed to proclaim the truth, will inevitably find the world armed against them; for, as all its efforts against the truth are in vain, it turns its strength against the ministers of the truth. It calumniates them; it loads them with reproach; it treats them as seducers and hypocrites; it makes them the impious subject of its derision and its censures; it raises continual obstacles and contradictions against them; and sets every engine to work, to the end that the holy ministry may become disgustful to them. Such afflictions and tribulations are often the lot of the wisest and best regulated zeal; but then he who possesses this zeal, always influenced by charity, is not irritated either against the world, which thus loads him with insults, or against the ministry which exposes him to them. On the contrary, as we have already observed, the more he sees sinners revolting against the truth, the more is his charity for them excited and inflamed; the more rancor and bitterness they manifest towards him, the more mildness and tenderness does he display towards them; the more deplorable their situation is, the more is he exercised with secret grief on their account—with grief like that of a tender mother, when her children are torn from her bosom. He studies only that his zeal may be regulated by discretion, in order that his imprudences may not subject him to the contradiction of sinners; but when, notwithstanding his prudent management, he experiences these contradictions, his mildness and charity are not abated. This is the first trial of zeal, contradiction and opposition from the world.

Further, the truly zealous minister will experience trials from his brethren in the ministry, and from that diversity of doctrines and opinions of which the adversary takes advantage, but too successfully, to oppose a fatal obstacle to the progress of the gospel.

But he who is actuated by a pious and charitable zeal will not be provoked against those of his brethren who, by their indiscretion or by their false doctrine, subvert that foundation which he wishes to establish ; he only prays that God would manifest the truth to them, and that a divine light may dissipate their errors, and triumph over their prejudices, to the end that unanimity among ministers may give to truth the force and efficacy, of which it is deprived by their divisions. He does not wound the cause of Christ, in the house of his friends, by openly reviling those ministers who are unfaithful ; nor does he add to the scandal of their unfaithfulness that of his own anger and hatred. He knows that bitter invectives against ministers are always turned against the ministry ; that by condemning each other, we authorize the world to refuse to all of us its respect and attention ; and that our object should be to efface the spots with which unfaithful preachers may have disfigured the truth, without blackening and degrading their characters.

Such are the trials which we experience from the world, and such those which originate in the sanctuary, where we look only for succor and consolation. God, in his wisdom, permits these trials, not to distress us, but to prove and crown our zeal ; therefore, to be irritated on account of that opposition with which men obstruct the work of God is, in reality, to throw the blame on God himself, who renders the malice of men subservient to ends which to us are unknown. Perhaps he intends that his glory shall be made to appear more illustrious, by the very difficulties which seem to oppose to it an insurmountable obstacle. He has always carried on his designs by methods most suited, in a human view, to defeat them ; he ordered the sacrifice of Isaac, though he determined that an innumerable multitude of people should spring from him ; he raised the whole world against the Apostles, at a time when he determined to cause the world to submit to the faith, by their ministry. The con-

tradictions which his wisdom permits have always been a prelude to success ; his works have ever been marked with this divine character ; and he designs by this not only to try our faith, but to humble our pride. We wish to be able to attribute the success of our enterprises to the wisdom of our own measures ; he disconcerts them ; he permits the malice of men to turn them against ourselves ; he leaves us to see no hopes of succeeding, to the end that success may be his work alone, and that we may give all the glory to him. If every thing succeeded at first according to our wishes,—if our way was always made smooth before us, a success so prompt, so continual, so easy, would lead us to believe, that it was to be ascribed wholly to ourselves ; we should secretly do honor to our own talents, and to the wisdom of our own conduct ; we should not sufficiently acknowledge the finger of God. But when obstacles themselves facilitate his work ; when the good at which we aim seems to arise, even from the very circumstances which appeared calculated to stifle it in the birth ; and when every thing is accomplished, at a time when it appeared most desperate, then we cry out with the Prophet, " It is the Lord and not man who has done all these things." We become sensible of our own impotence and unfaithfulness ; we no more trust in an arm of flesh—in the feeble talents of man ; we no longer consider the opposition of the world as a just cause of chagrin and anger ; this opposition consoles instead of irritating ; it increases instead of lessening our hope ; it animates instead of cooling our zeal ; the more it increases, the nigher we conceive ourselves to that moment, when he, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is about to annihilate opposition, or make it subservient to his own work ; we cease to be irritated with men on account of obstacles which seem to defer and suspend that period ; or if we find fault with any one, it is with ourselves, for our

own sins which alone retard the work of God. But even this sense of our own impotence does not discourage us; it only excites in us new attention to ourselves; it stimulates to new exertions in duty; it rouses us from our lukewarmness and indolence; and we present ourselves to the combat with more fervor, and with weapons suited to destroy every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God.

8. From this characteristic of zeal there arises another—the last which I shall mention; it not only is not provoked against sinners, but it does not even think evil of them. "Charity—thinketh no evil."

It is a fault very common with persons who are zealous for the truth to believe the situation of sinners, whom they find insensible to instruction, to advice, and to remonstrance, to be desperate; the more they desire the salvation of such sinners, the more do they despair of it. They think they can plainly discover in them, written in legible characters, that they are forsaken of God; their language conforms to the rashness of their thoughts; they publicly bewail them as already judged; they mourn for their loss; and as if they had entered into the secret counsels of the Lord, or as if his mercies were not more abundant than the sins of men, they weep over those as already lost, whom God is perhaps upon the point of saving. It is rashness thus to anticipate the secret judgments of God; it is distrust of the power of his grace.

While Saul was persecuting the Church of God, and inflicting the greatest sufferings upon the followers of Christ, assembled at Jerusalem, one could not have believed there was any rashness in considering him as a scourge of God, destined to purify his saints, and afterwards to be cast into eternal fire, there to suffer for his cruel persecution of the Christians; however while he was still armed against Christ, a

sudden and unexpected stroke of grace converted this persecutor into an Apostle. Judas, on the contrary, called by Christ himself to be a disciple, the companion of his travels, the witness of his miracles, was doubtless supposed to be appointed to sit one day upon one of the twelve thrones, destined to the Apostles, there to judge the twelve tribes of Israel; however, he himself was judged before that day; he became a "Son of perdition," the first apostate from Christianity, and died a reprobate. The children of the kingdom may be cast out; and God can raise up children to Abraham, even from stones—from hearts the most hard, and the most insensible. It is only for the conversion of Satan and his angels that we are forbidden to hope; but for sinners who still live among us, and for whom Christ died, however their sins may have abounded, the blood of the true Abel still cries to heaven, and demands not their punishment, but their salvation and deliverance.

Now you, who judge your fellow men before God has judged them, how do you know, says St. Paul, that you, who appear so firm in the ways of God, will not fall to rise no more? And that those, whom you believe to have fallen, without hope of remedy, will not rise to fall no more? Who has revealed to you the adorable secrets of the mercy and justice of the Lord, with regard to men? Are not the perseverance of saints and the conversion of sinners, equally the effect of free grace, and the gratuitous gifts of mercy? Why then will you believe it right to hope the first for yourselves, and to despair of the other for your fellow men? Take care, says the Apostle, not to judge before the time; there are in the treasures of divine mercy so many resources unknown to us, and in the terrors of divine justice so many depths into which we are forbidden to search, that we ought always to work out our own salvation with fear, and expect that of others with hope. The highest point of iniquity is often the first moment of grace; when

the prodigal son is at the greatest distance from his father, without hope of returning, and as it were lost in a strange country, it is then that he says, "I will return to my father." He in fact returns; the kiss of peace and reconciliation is given to him; and he is restored to his forfeited privileges. Thus the true zeal of charity never despairs: "Charity—hopeth all things."

Further, it sometimes happens that people are not satisfied with judging and condemning a sinner because of iniquity which really exists, and which is visible, but they think they see sin where there is none; this is another essential fault of the zeal of some, and opposed to that charity which "thinketh no evil." Yes, my brethren, of the various reproaches which the world, the perpetual calumniator of religion, casts upon the righteous, this is not the most unjust, that they are sometimes too severe in judging others. Instead of being confirmed in that charity which hopes the best of every one, many give themselves up to that false zeal which believes the worst; and they make a merit of seeing more clearly than others into the faults of their neighbors. True charity covers the failings of others, and scarcely sees the evil which is visible to all the world; but many pretend to see that which is invisible to other men. Charity conceals that which it cannot excuse, but they do not excuse even that which appearances justify, and render at least uncertain. They think they give glory to God, when they judge others to be more sinful and more full of worldly desires than they appear to be; and they applaud themselves for any discovery which happens to confirm their suspicions. Now, nothing resembles charity less than that malignant eye which is open only to discover the faults of others; and the same charity which should make us desire their salvation, will discover to us in them circumstances which will lead us at least to hope it.

Let us leave to men of the world, my brethren, malignant judgments, and rash suspicions and thoughts. As hatred, envy, and jealousy are the great springs of their judgments, it is not astonishing that they should all bear the marks of these baneful passions. But for us, destined by our calling to labors of love, vicars and ministers of the love of Jesus Christ to men, our thoughts and our judgments ought to bear the stamp of our employments and our ministry. That sharp, cruel, satirical zeal, always more ready to censure than to instruct—always clear sighted in discovering errors which escape the notice of others' eyes—always reluctant to believe good of any one—always ready to assign criminal motives to the actions of men—always indisposed to be indulgent to others, and to interpret their conduct favorably ;—that zeal which gives itself full license in speaking of the faults of others—which makes them an occasion of satire, rather than of tears and prayers—which sees by anticipation the evil not yet committed—which glories in having predicted the most shameful crimes, and honors itself for the prediction—which publicly boasts of never having been the dupe of appearances that have deceived other men ; such zeal is not the charity which " rejoiceth not in iniquity, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

Let us then, my brethren, be on our guard against ourselves, while performing services in which we appear to seek only the glory of God, and the salvation of our fellow men. It is extremely difficult for man not to mingle something of his own with every thing that passes through his hands ; he is like an infected canal, whatever runs through which, though originally pure, contracts some stain. But what ought still more to excite our attention is, that we are charged with the honor and interests of religion ; and this is debased and dishonored by every thing merely human in our labors. Men of the world will pardon nothing

in us; they are delighted with an opportunity of recriminating, and of avenging themselves for our reproaching them for their vices, by reproaching us for our errors without any indulgence. Instead of influencing sinners to reform, by false zeal, we only furnish them with new pretexts for impenitence; we cause them to revolt against the truth; we present it to them under a hideous and forbidding form; and we take from it every thing amiable, every thing calculated to touch the conscience and affect the heart.

To conclude, let us remember, my brethren, that the zeal of charity, like charity itself, is long-suffering and kind, not envious, not rash, not vain, not selfish, not easily provoked, not suspicious, and not inclined to think evil of others. Let us banish these odious traits from our zeal; let us wholly renounce ourselves, and leave the Spirit of God alone to speak and act in us. He vanquished the world by the mouth of the first ministers of the gospel; he will again vanquish it by ours, if it is he alone who inspires us and causes us to speak. If the truth makes little progress among men, the fault is to be ascribed to us, not to the truth. The world was formerly much more opposed to it, when it first began to appear in the preaching of the gospel; but the fury of tyrants, the power of Cesars, the vain wisdom of philosophers, the ancient superstitions of the whole world, the most shameful passions, authorized by a worship which the majesty of laws rendered respectable,—all these obstacles, to appearance so insurmountable, gave way before it; and the most profound darkness yielded to the force and splendor of its light. Let us then enter into the spirit of our holy predecessors, and we may hope our labors will be crowned with similar success; let us imitate their zeal and we may expect to reap the same fruit; for "the arm of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." Amen.

Sermon III.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MINISTRY. A SERMON PREACHED AT A COLLEGE TO A NUMBER OF YOUNG MINISTERS.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

LUKE II. 22, 23.

And—they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord; As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

IT was written and ordained in the law, my brethren, that every first born male, among the Jews, should be consecrated to the Lord, and separated from his brethren; that he should be considered as holy; that the world should have no claim upon him; and that he should be presented to the Lord, as a first fruit which God had reserved to himself alone, and which must be redeemed by another offering.

Jesus Christ, the first born among his brethren, typified by the first born of the Hebrews, in our Text obeys this law, and developes its figure and mystery. This consecration of Christ, to God and his service, is, in a sense, the model of ours. We are devoted to the altar; we are separated from the rest of mankind, and dedicated to the particular service of God. Now the principal characteristic of this conse-

cration is a separation from the world and its common concerns, that we may give up ourselves to the work of the ministry.

I acknowledge that the manners of the Clergy ought to have nothing austere or rigid in them. Called by our office to urge sinners to repentance, it is necessary that we should, at times, be with them. Under the Jewish dispensation, the sacerdotal tribe was spread and dispersed among the other tribes, to point out to us that it is necessary for the clergy to mingle occasionally with the people, and that our example is not the least of our duties.

But it is not the charity which expands itself, which is active, which renders itself useful, and which edifies, that I wish to condemn; it is that love of the world which would lead us astray, dissipate us, render us unprofitable, and give offence; it is that violent inclination for worldly enjoyments which would call us from the holy duties of the sanctuary, render them disagreeable to us, and throw us into the tumult and dangers of the world; it is that unprofitable, worldly life which would lead us from dissipation to dissipation; connect us with the assemblies of sinners,—with their maxims, their pursuits, and their pleasures; and which would lead on from what are called the decorums of life to amusements, from amusements to dangers, from dangers to vice. Now nothing is more incompatible with the gravity and holiness of our calling than a life thus devoted to the world. To prove this is my design, in the ensuing discourse, in which I shall attempt to show what is the Spirit of the Ministry.

The Spirit of the Ministry is a Spirit of Prayer,—of Mourning,—of Labor,—of Zeal,—of Knowledge,—of Piety.

1. A Spirit of Prayer.

Prayer is the ornament of the priesthood, the most essential duty of a minister, the soul of all his func-

tions. Without prayer he is no longer of any use in the ministry—of any service to Christians. He plants, but God does not give the increase; he preaches, but his words are as sounding brass; he recites the praises of the Lord, but his heart does not join in them, and he honors God but with his lips. In one word, without prayer, a minister is without soul and without life, all whose labors in the vineyard of the Lord are but like the mechanical movements of an inanimate machine. It is then prayer alone which constitutes the strength and the success of his different services; and he ceases to be acceptable to God or useful to man, as soon as he ceases to pray. In prayer consists all his consolation; and his functions become to him like the yoke of a hireling—like hard, burdensome, and painful tasks, if prayer neither alleviates their burden, solaces their pains, nor consoles him for the little success attending them.

Now prayer supposes a pure spirit, a spirit free from those vain and dangerous images which pollute the soul, or obscure its light; it supposes a mind replete with spiritual ideas, and familiarized to meditation on divine truth—a mind which departs from its proper employment, when it is necessary to turn its attention to the perplexing and unprofitable cares of the world, and which easily resumes, when again quitting these cares, the thought and the recollection of those eternal truths from which it had been diverted. Prayer supposes a tranquil heart, in which the most lively sentiment is that of holy love to God, and gratitude for his mercies; a heart accustomed to spiritual enjoyments—timid, delicate, watchful—always guarded against sinful impressions—always attentive to abstain from every thing which can abate its delightful intercourse with the Lord. This is what the spirit of prayer requires.

Now, my brethren, is it possible to conceive, that such a state of mind can consist with dissipated and worldly manners? When leaving a conversation in

which the imagination has been filled with public intrigues—with the pretensions and the hopes of men —and with every thing dazzling and contagious which the world offers—when leaving such scenes, can you expect to find yourselves disposed for recollection at the feet of Jesus Christ? And with the head full of those profane images, can you there meditate on those truths which are often attended with a cloud before the purest eye; and which the most pious heart, burdened only with the weight of an earthly body, cannot always relish? What do I say? When leaving the company of sinners where you have seen many dangerous objects—where, with the seeds of passion, you have suffered to enter the sources of many temptations which will trouble the peace of your souls, and tend to extinguish all regard for God and divine things—can you pass from these profane places to the feet of the altar, there to pray for yourselves and the people, there to avert the anger of the Lord, there to deplore the wickedness of a world which you have just applauded, and in which you have taken part, and there to attend upon the holy mysteries with that silence of the senses, that profound recollection, that religious terror, that majestic gravity, and that calmness of heart and mind which are so necessary in the spiritual employment of the ministry? Alas! you will carry to the sanctuary the amusements, the illusions, the dangerous objects of the world, in the midst of which you live; your inflamed imaginations will force you from the altar, and again drag and transport you into the world, where you have left your hearts; your minds, even while you are engaged in prayer, in the sanctuary, will be occupied only in reviewing your pleasures; you will there converse more with the world than with God; and not only will your ministry become useless to your fellow men and yourselves, but you will provoke the anger of the Lord; you will draw down upon the people a curse instead of a blessing; and your

ministry, which ought to be a ministry of reconciliation and of life, will become a ministry of death, of hatred, and of perdition. You will not be long in experiencing this yourselves; you will feel the first shafts of the indignation of God. If you suffer the world to extinguish in you the spirit of prayer, that intercourse of the soul with God, which is so delightful to the pious and faithful, will not be desired by you; you will shorten the seasons of worship; by little and little, you will lose all relish for the services of religion, till you finally abandon them; you will then decay; you will perish; you will fall; and you, who ought to mourn for the sins of your fellow men, will not be affected even with your own; your functions themselves will harden you; you will justify the errors and the pleasures of the world by participating of them; and instead of leading you to sorrow and mourning, as they ought to do, they will flatter your taste, and corrupt your hearts.

2. The Spirit of our Ministry is a Spirit of Mourning.

We are those ambassadors of peace, of whom the prophet speaks, who ought to weep bitterly, because the ways of righteousness lie waste; hardly any one walks in the way which conducts to life; the covenant has become unprofitable; and the Lord seems to have cast away his people. "The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The high ways lie waste; the way-faring man ceaseth; he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man."* Yes, my brethren, we ought to be men of grief; and to mourn incessantly, between the porch and the altar,† for the scandals which dishonor the Church, and expose it to the derision of the wicked.

Samuel, after the fall of Saul, retired and passed the rest of his days in lamenting the unhappy destiny

* Isaiah xxxiii. 7, 8. † Joel ii. 17.

of that prince. Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd and the model for others, seeing Jerusalem hardened in blindness, and upon the point of ruin, wept over it; and he could not restrain his tears at the sight of Lazarus when dead, because in him he discovered the image of a soul spiritually dead. Our compassion, should be excited by the miseries and vices of our fellow men; we ought to have the feelings of a mother towards them. Indeed, my brethen, whilst there are sinners upon earth, sorrow and mourning will be the lot of faithful ministers; whilst the children of Israel, in the plain, are engaged in dancing and feasting—whilst they forget the God of their fathers, and prostitute their homage to a golden calf, the true Moseses, upon the mountain, will rend their garments, break their hearts before the Lord, and offer themselves to be accursed for their brethren. The world will rejoice, said Christ to his Apostles; the children of this world, dancing and uttering shouts of joy, will hasten to precipitate themselves into the abyss; laughter and play may be their portion; sadness should be yours; the world, in which I leave you, should always be to you a spectacle of grief and lamentation; and though it should not persecute you—though crosses and gibbets, should not await you, its corruption alone should cause you to pass your days in mourning and bitterness. "The world shall rejoice, and ye shall be sorrowful."*

Now, can you unite this spirit of mourning with the vain cares and unprofitable amusements of the world? I ask you, what is the object of men of the world in all their occupations? Pleasure. You cannot therefore associate with such men without being either witnesses, or approvers, or accomplices of their pleasures. Though you should be but witnesses, can a minister of Christ familiarize his eyes to objects which ought to pierce his heart? Can he amuse

* John xvi. 20.

himself with them? The primitive Doctors of the Church forbad Christians the sight of gladiators, believing that the disciples of the mild and charitable Jesus could not innocently feed their eyes with the blood and death of those unfortunate persons, and derive a cruel pleasure from a sight which ought to inspire them with horror, and make them deplore the lot and the eternal ruin of those unhappy victims. Ye priests, pastors of souls, and co-workers with the love of Jesus Christ in their salvation! Behold the sad objects from which you are not ashamed to derive amusement. With pleasure you see your fellow men perish, and mutually lend each other arms to hasten their death; you see them inflict mortal wounds; you see them devour one another with the most malignant arrows of scandal; and this sad carnage which you witness amuses you; and what you ought to lament with tears of blood, makes you pass the most agreeable moments of your lives.

But you will not long remain simply spectators of these scenes; you will approve them. For to mingle among men of the world, for the purpose of being their continual censors, and of poisoning their pleasures, by an air of chagrin and austerity, is unnatural; and it is not frequenting their company which authorizes you to reprove them. They will have a right to say to you, Why do you come among us? This is not your place. Why do you wish to be continual witnesses of what you think so worthy of blame? People do not very much hate that from which they cannot forbear; your departure from these places would be more becoming than your censures. Now, not to condemn them is to consent to their works of darkness; it is to approve of them.

But you will go still further; you will participate in them; you will at last appear yourselves upon the stage. For we cannot long refrain from following examples which are continually exhibited by those whom we choose as associates; we wish to be what

others are; we soon grow weary of being singular. Thus, to-day, complaisance, to-morrow, some other pretence, and another time, inclination will lead you from one scene to another, till having a long time familiarized yourselves with the sight of the abuses and disorders of the world, you will at last freely join in with them.

The people of God were not slow in imitating the manners of the Canaanites, as soon as they had contracted leagues with them, and established a familiar intercourse which Moses had forbidden. That taste which leads us to seek the world is already but a secret desire to imitate it; we are already disposed to live like the world when we cannot refrain from it; it is conformity of inclinations which generally forms intimacies; and people do not connect themselves with the world, but because they have the same taste with the world. The family of Jacob in Egypt lived always separate from the Egyptians; they inhabited a land apart, because their customs had nothing in common with those of Egypt. The children of Israel offered animals in sacrifice to the Lord, and Egypt worshipped them. Their situation was typical of ours. We form a people apart, in the midst of the world, because we ought to sacrifice to God those passions of the flesh which the world adores. As soon as we break the barrier which separates us from the world—as soon as we leave this happy land of Goshen, and go to mingle among idolaters, their worship becomes ours. Separation from them constitutes all our safety, and maintains a diversity of manners; by mixing, we form but one people with them, and become like them.

But, my brethren, were there nothing criminal in a worldly life, for the Clergy, but unprofitableness and indolence, for that reason alone it ought to be interdicted to ministers, who are appointed to cultivate the field of the Lord; to watch incessantly for fear the enemy should sow tares in it; and to give their

whole attention to those laborious functions to which they became engaged, by their consecration to the service of God. This truth furnishes my third reflection.

3. The Spirit of our Ministry is a Spirit of Labor.

The Church, of which we are ministers, is a vine—a field—a harvest—an edifice, which is building, and which should grow every day—a holy warfare;—these are all terms which suppose care and fatigue, they are all symbols of labor and application. A minister is placed in the Church, like the first man in the terrestrial paradise, "to dress it and to keep it."* He is accountable for his time to the people of his charge. All, therefore, that he employs in vain and useless intercourse with others, except for necessary relaxation; all the days, all the moments which he suffers to be lost in the uselessness of worldly society—in amusements and dissipation, are days and moments which ought to have been devoted to the salvation of his fellow men; and for which they will demand an account of him before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. By ordination he becomes a public minister; the people acquire a real right over his person, his leisure, his occupations, his talents. These are consecrated goods, which form, as it were, the patrimony of the people; he is but the depositary of them, and can no longer dispose of them according to his own inclination. As soon then as he abandons th eemployment connected with his office, he proves himself unworthy of it; he ceases to be a minister, from the moment that he ceases to be laborious; and he passes, in indolence, or in vain amusements, always improper and often dangerous, that time which ought to be devoted to the salvation of his people.

Will you then, my brethren, pretend to be ministers of Christ, and spend your time in indolence or

* Genesis ii. 13.

vain amusements? What! whilst the chiefs of the people of God are contending with the enemies of his name; whilst so many holy ministers are devoting themselves to the most painful employments, for the salvation of their people; whilst so many zealous servants of God, even when their health is wasted by years and fatigue, abate nothing in their labors and in their zeal, but even redouble their cares and vigilance, in proportion as their strength decreases, and generously sacrifice themselves, like the Apostle, to promote the cause of the Redeemer; whilst so many faithful Missionaries are traversing dangerous seas, and seeking, in the most distant isles, either martyrdom, as the recompense of their zeal, or the salvation of heathen nations, whom God seems to have abandoned;—will you, who are honored with the same ministry, will you indolently languish in idleness, which is not only highly unbecoming your character, but which the world would deem shameful in any common member of the state? You, who are men of God upon the earth, interpreters of his will, his envoys among men, will you forget your title, your employments, his interests, his glory and your own? And will you degrade yourselves by an empty and useless life, which would render you not only an opprobrium to the Church, but even the shame of civil society, and an object of derision, even in the eyes of men of the world? For, my brethren, among them every one has his calling; every one has duties and employments which occupy a part of his life; the magistrate, the soldier, the father of a family, the merchant, the mechanic—they all have days, hours, and seasons devoted to the employments of their profession; the life of all these different sorts of citizens has occupations belonging to it. An indolent and wordly minded priest is, therefore, the most useless and the most unoccupied man upon earth; he alone, all whose moments are so precious, whose duties are so serious and so numerous, whose cares ought to in-

crease as the vices of men multiply—he alone has no employment among men; passes his days in a continual void—in a circle of frivolous inutilities; and that life which ought to be the most occupied, the most loaded with duties, the most respected, becomes the most empty and the most despicable life that is seen in the world.

When David urged the generous Uriah to return into his house, and there enjoy domestic pleasures in retirement,—What! answered that valiant and faithful officer, whilst all my brethren are encamped in their tents, and exposing their lives in combat, for the defence of the people of God, shall I remain alone here in idleness, in the midst of the pleasures and enjoyments of a family?* Behold, then, what an indolent and worldly minister ought incessantly to say to himself: 'Shall I live in effeminacy and idleness, and be of no use either to the Church or the State, whilst every other man is engaged in some occupation in society; and whilst my brethren in the ministry generously sacrifice themselves for the happiness of their people, and derive glory and a high pleasure from the fatigues and dangers which they experience in promoting the salvation of their fellow men?'

Indeed, my brethren, whilst there are sinners to convert, ignorant people to instruct, weak in the faith to support, afflicted to console, oppressed to defend, and impious men and unbelievers to confound, can a priest find time for the pleasures and vanities of worldly society? Are we then made for an idle life? we who, with the closest application, are not sufficient for all our duties? Behold Jesus Christ, the chief shepherd, and the model of others, sitting upon the borders of a well in Samaria. Notwithstanding his fatigue, he will not relax from doing the work for which he was sent; he will not abstain from his labors, even to give himself time for a sober and frugal

* 2 Samuel xi. 11.

repast. "My meat," said he to his disciples, who were urging him to eat, "is to do the will of my Father."* He beholds the fields ripe and the harvest ready; and whilst his Father wants laborers, and the harvest is upon the point of being lost, he will not spend a moment in indolence, but improves this period in bringing back to the truth a woman who was a sinner. By this example let us estimate the value of our time, and the use we ought to make of it.

It is related in the holy scriptures, that Nehemiah, when occupied in rebuilding the temple, was solicited, by the officers of the King of Persia, to descend into the plains of Ono, to treat with them, and to celebrate the interview with feasting and rejoicing.—"Come," said they to him, "let us meet together, in some one of the villages of the plains of Ono."† But that holy man, charged with a ministry so sacred, and believing it was not lawful for him to interrupt it, by mere ceremony and complaisance, answered them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"‡ Now, is a minister of Christ, when occupied in repairing the spiritual edifice of the Church—in raising a temple to the living God, in the hearts of believers, is he engaged in an employment less holy and important? And what ought he to oppose to those who exert themselves to turn him from it, under frivolous pretexts, and to engage him in the unprofitable and vain employments of the world, but that wise reply of the pious Jewish minister? "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down, lest it should be neglected." What more worthy of his ministry, and also more respectable in the eyes of the world, than to refuse to be diverted, by the solicitations of men, from his holy employment? What more worthy than to prefer the work of God, that work so great, so sublime,

* John iv. 34. † Nehemiah vi. 2. ‡ Chap. vi. 3.

so honorable, to the trifling and unprofitable occupations of the children of this world?—to respect his ministry and his functions?—to esteem every thing, which so uselessly occupies the men of the world, as low and unworthy of his elevated calling?—and to believe that all the moments which he gives to the world, without necessity, are so many moments refused towards building the holy Jerusalem, and that by this means the accomplishment of the work of God upon the earth would be retarded? "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down, lest it should be neglected."

I am sensible that great zeal and firmness are necessary to enable us to break the bonds of flesh and blood; and to interdict ourselves almost all intercourse with a world with which we are connected by so many ties; and to which our own inclinations draw us. But this furnishes me with a fourth reflection, as a new proof of the truth of which I wish to convince you.

4. I say then, in the fourth place, that the Spirit of our Ministry is a Spirit of Zeal and Firmness.

It is our duty to exhort, to correct, to reprove, "in season and out of season." We ought to bear our testimony boldly against public sins and abuses. The face of a Christian minister ought not to blush for the ignominy, which indulgences, unbecoming his character, never fail to produce; he bears, written upon his forehead, with much more majesty than the High Priest of the law, "the doctrine and the truth;" he ought to know no one according to the flesh. He who, by the imposition of hands, has been set apart to the holy ministry, should manifest an heroic disposition, which elevates him above his own weakness,—which infuses into him noble, great, generous sentiments, and such as are worthy his elevated calling,—which raises him above fears,

hopes, reputation, and opprobrium, and above every thing which influences the conduct of other men.

Now, this spirit of courage and firmness is very much opposed to the spirit of the world. For the spirit of the world is a temporising spirit,—a spirit of politeness, complaisance, attentions, and management. To pass well with the world, a man must have no opinion of his own; he must think always with the greatest number, or at least with the most influential; he must have approbation always ready to bestow, and wait only for the moment when it will be most agreeable. It is necessary for him to be able to smile at impiety; to accustom his ears to the most severe and cruel strokes of slander; to give praise to ambition and a desire of preferment; and to suffer a preference to be given to natural above moral and spiritual talents. In fine, if we wish to live in the world, we must think, or at least speak like the world; it will not do to carry thither an uncompliant, harsh spirit; for this a person would soon become an object of ridicule and contempt, and he himself would soon become disgusted with it. Thus we, who ought to be "the salt of the earth" must accommodate ourselves to the children of the world, and "lose our savor;" we, who ought to be the censors of the world, must become its panegyrists; we, who ought to be "the light of the world," must perpetuate its blindness, by our approbation or by our cowardice; in one word, we, who ought be to instruments in the salvation of the world, must perish with the world.

Admitting that, when you first go to mingle with worldly scenes, you may intend not to be seduced from the path of duty; admitting that you at first possess sincerity, firmness, and courage; you will soon deviate from them. Those ideas of zeal and firmness against vice, with which you enter into the world, will soon grow weaker; intimacy with the world will soon make them appear to you unsocial

and erroneous; to them will succeed ideas more pleasant, more agreeable to man, more according to the common manner of thinking; what appeared zeal and duty, you will regard as excessive and imprudent severity; and what appeared virtue and ministerial prudence, you will consider as unnecessary singularity. Nothing enervates that firmness becoming the ministerial character like associating freely with men of the world. We enter, by little and little, and without perceiving it ourselves, into their prejudices, and adopt the excuses and vain reasonings to which they have recourse to justify their errors; by associating with them we cease to think them so culpable; we even become almost apologists for their effeminacy, their idleness, their luxury, their ambition, their passions; we accustom ourselves, like the world, to give to those vices softer names; and what confirms us in this new system of conduct is, that it has the approbation of men of the world, who give to our cowardly compliance with their customs the specious names of moderation, greatness of mind, acquaintance with the world, a talent to render virtue amiable; and to the contrary conduct the odious names of littleness, superstition, excess, and severity, calculated only to drive people from virtue, and to render piety either odious or contemptible. Thus, from gratitude, we treat those in a friendly manner who bestow upon our cowardice the honor and homage due to firmness and zeal; we believe them more innocent, since they think us more amiable; we show more indulgence to their vices, since they metamorphose our vices into virtues. For how uncommon is it for people to be severe and troublesome censors of their admirers? And how few are there like Barnabas and Saul, who, because they would not relax any thing from the truth, were stoned by the very people who, but a moment before, were ready to offer incense to them as to gods descended upon earth?

A spirit of zeal is therefore incompatible with a frequent intercourse with the world; you will find less to reprove in proportion as you familiarize yourselves with what is reprehensible; attention to religious books will become a disagreeable and wearisome occupation to you; you will soon lose a taste for them; and in place of serious study and such as is adapted to your calling, you will substitute vain and frivolous reading, if not such as is indecent and dangerous, because this will make you appear better in the view of men of the world. This leads me to observe,

5. In the fifth place, that the Spirit of our Ministry is a Spirit of Knowledge.

"The lips of a priest," says the Spirit of God, "should keep knowledge."* We are ordered, like the prophet to devour the sacred volume of the law, notwithstanding the bitterness of laborious study; we must nourish ourselves with spiritual food by the sweat of our brow; and adorn our souls with the law of God as the Jewish priests did their garments. Ministers of religion are compared, by an eminent Father, to those two great luminaries which God at first placed in the firmament. They are to preside over the day and over the night;—over the day, by guiding the faith and piety of believers;—over the night, by enlightening the darkness of error, infidelity, and false doctrine. They are the interpreters of the law,—the teachers of the people,—the seers and prophets, appointed to enlighten their doubts, or to make known to them the will of the Lord.

Now, judge whether it is possible to unite dissipated and worldly manners with the conduct becoming such a great and dignified office. Knowledge is not to be considered as one of those rare gifts which God distributes to whom he will, and with which all are not favored; it is an essential—an absolutely neces-

* Malachi ii. 7.

sary talent for the ministry. The Apostle, having enumerated the different gifts which God bestowed upon the rising Churches, and remarked that some were prophets, others had the gift of tongues, and others the power of healing diseases, and working other miracles, adds that many were established as "*Pastors* and *Teachers*,"* He does not separate these two titles, because one is a necessary attendant upon the other. Now, nothing is more fatal to a taste for useful knowledge than a familiar intercourse with the scenes of the world. Order, retirement, and recollection are necessary for study; continual dissipation and interruption relax the fervor of the mind and destroy all relish for close application. I do not mean simply, that they prevent a person from undertaking profound studies, from searching into the obscurity of antiquity, concerning the doctrine and discipline of primitive Christians, and from enriching the Church with new works; but for those common and ordinary studies, which are indispensible for a Christian minister, that he may instruct himself in his duty, acquaint himself with the truths which he is obliged to preach, and qualify himself to exercise his functions with understanding and with profit;—for these, there is a necessity of a mind accustomed to think—to meditate—to be with itself; it is necessary that too frequent attentions to the world do not render books insupportably wearisome and disgusting; there must be a certain desire of improvement, and of acquiring instruction; a serious turn of mind, opposed to every thing frivolous; a habit of retirement and reflection; a methodical arrangement of life, in which the moments destined to different duties are always found in their place, and conformed to their destination; in a word, a uniform, busy, regular kind of life, with which the inutilities, the perpetual changes, the derangement, and the

* Ephesians iv. 11.

confusion of a worldly life are entirely incompatible. A love of books, my brethren, and particularly of books relating to your serious calling, will be your only safety; as soon as you no more can find any thing in them to fix your attention, interest you, and fill up the void of your days, you will seek relief from the world; its scenes,—its amusements will become necessary for you; you can no longer do without them; in vain will you propose to yourselves certain bounds and rules; in vain will you resolve to divide your time between your books and the world; you will soon pass wholly over to the side of the latter; and a taste for its scenes will increase —will strengthen itself in you every day; and in proportion as this increases, your taste for books, already so feeble and languishing, will fall and become wholly extinct; distaste will soon change into aversion; you can no longer support a single moment of application and serious reading; you will not even attempt to conquer yourselves with regard to this; and idleness, once become pleasing and familiar, will leave nothing serious in your lives and about your persons but some remains of the external symbols of your profession, which will be only a reproach to you. Thus far will you be from possessing and preserving that piety which honors the ministry, and sanctifies all its functions. This furnishes my last observation.

6. I say then, in the last place, The Spirit of the Ministry is a Spirit of Piety.

By this spirit of piety I mean not only good morals, but that purity of heart, that tenderness of conscience, that taste for divine things, which simply the appearance of evil disturbs. Such a spirit of piety is the soul of our ministry, and on this depends all its success. We are continually conversant with holy things; temples, altars, the holy mysteries, spiritual songs, the word of life;—it is in the midst of these

great, these divine objects, that we pass our days; all our occupations relate to objects, in the view of which angels themselves tremble.

Now, my brethren, a serious consideration of these things could not fail to make the most pious distrustful of themselves, and sensible of their need of continual assistance from God. What a life of prayer, of retirement, of circumspection, of faith, of rigorous government of the passions, is necessary to prepare us for such services? A minister of religion ought not to indulge himself in any thing which he cannot carry to the sanctuary,—any thing which would be unbecoming in that place. He certainly ought not then to carry thither dispositions, affections, and desires which are common and worldly. It is necessary that the fire of divine love should purify his heart and raise it from a common to a holy and elevated state; in a word, as nothing is greater and more sublime than his functions, so nothing ought to be purer and more sublime than his piety.

Will you then think of going from an assembly of pleasure to the house of God? Will you go to invoke a blessing from God, with the same mouth with which you have just pronounced vain and trifling words? Will you attempt to administer Christian ordinances with a mind filled with frivolous and indecent images? Instead of elevating your minds and hearts on high, will you suffer them to dwell upon the mean objects of the world?—upon objects unworthy of occupying the attention of a wise man, at any time, and much more of diverting a minister of Christ from an attention to the sacred duties of his office?

But further, a worldly and dissipated life is inconsistent not only with that piety which we ought to possess when officiating at the holy altar, but also with that grave and edifying conduct which is necessary to prepare us for all the functions of the ministry, and without which we cannot expect success.

If, my brethren, you associate freely with men of the world, with what propriety can you speak of avoiding the world,—of the dangers to which people are there exposed,—of the necessity of prayer, and recollection, and watchfulness,—of the eye which must be plucked out, when it becomes an occasion of offence,—of the account which we must render for every idle word,—and of all those mortifying maxims so foreign from your manners, and so unknown to the world? With what an air of coldness and dryness must you appear? The holy truths of salvation come but with regret, and with an air of constraint, from a mouth accustomed to frivolous and worldly conversation. To imitate the Apostle, in preaching Christ crucified with success, we must, like him, be attached to the cross of Christ; to affect the heart, there must be expressions which proceed from a heart that is itself affected. Without this you will be in the Christian pulpit, like those mercenary declaimers, who formerly made a parade of their eloquence, in the public schools of Rome and Athens, upon vague and indifferent subjects, which interested neither the hearers nor the speakers; you will make of the ministry of the word a vain exercise of parade and ostentation,—a spectacle for the world, and not a serious instruction for sinners; you will seek the applauses of your hearers, rather than their conversion,—your own glory rather than that of Jesus Christ,—yourselves rather than the salvation of your fellow men. But though you should speak with an apparent zeal, though you should borrow the most lively and affecting expressions of Christian eloquence, though you yourselves should appear to be moved, in what light do you suppose your hearers, who are acquainted with the dissipation of your manners, and the perpetual uselessness of your lives, will view you? What will they think of you, when they shall hear you lamenting sinful practices in which they know you indulge yourselves? Your lamentations will appear to

them like the lamentations of the theatre; you will have played your part well, in their view; and all the holiness, and all the majesty, and all the terrors of the gospel will produce no effect upon them.

Indeed, my brethren, it is impossible to preserve, in the midst of worldly scenes, the seriousness becoming our ministry. Success in our labors, therefore, depends on our leading retired lives, and our not frequenting the company of the children of this world. By associating with such we shall accustom people to see us without respect and without attention. It is difficult to be always on our guard against ourselves; and the malignity of mankind will cause the smallest weakness which may escape us to be considered as a crime. There is nothing but loss for us in a familiar intercourse with men of the world; if we do not lose all regard for religion, we shall at least degrade our characters; if the world does not become our idol, we shall at least become its sport and contempt; if we do not imitate its manners and vices, we shall at least render our labors and our virtues useless.

These consequences of a worldly life may make you tremble; but they are inevitable; an intercourse with the world sooner or later leads to them. And besides, do you consider as nothing the stumbling block which, by such a life, you will throw in the way of your fellow men, and the grief which you will occasion to good people? What! Shall you be continually seen in the midst of the pleasures and vanities of the world, and will the world, in favor of you alone, not take offence at this? And will you not, by such conduct, greatly afflict your brethren who are faithful, and all those who are friends to the cause of truth and righteousness?

But our functions themselves, you will say, necessarily draw us into an intercourse with men of the world. True, but we shall rarely be there when we are there only on this account. When we have no

object but to conduct souls to Christ, we shall show ourselves only to point out to them the way. The moment they have found it, and can do without us, we shall conceal ourselves, become eclipsed, and enter again into the darkness and safety of retirement. Like that star which conducted the Magi to Christ, and which was a type of pastors; it showed itself as far as Bethlehem, whither it was to conduct those Sages of the East; but the moment they found, acknowledged, and adored the infant Saviour, it disappeared, became eclipsed, and entered again into the clouds of the firmament; its ministry was finished, and its appearance ceased with its ministry.

Therefore, my brethren, as you are now about to enter upon the public duties of the ministry, be on your guard against a taste for the world and its concerns. If you still cherish this fatal taste, be certain that this is a leaven which, if not destroyed, will one day corrupt the whole lump; and which will occasion your ruin. If this taste is so powerful that you despair of ever subjecting it to a sense of duty, take the world for your portion, before a holy engagement shall oblige you to separate from it for ever. Do not add to the dangers of a worldly life the crime of appearing there with a sacred character, which ought wholly to remove you from it; its seductions will be dangerous, even if the calling to which you may devote yourselves should make it your duty to appear there; judge then of the safety which you can promise yourselves, if you associate with the world in opposition to the commands of God, and against the rules of the holy profession which you have chosen. Amen.

Sermon IV.*

ON DEATH.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

LUKE VII. 12.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

WAS Death ever accompanied with more affecting circumstances? It is an only son;—the only successor to the name, the titles, the fortune of his ancestors, whom death takes from a widowed and disconsolate mother. It ravishes him from her in the flower of his age, and just at his entrance on the active scenes of life; at a time when, escaped from the accidents to which infancy and childhood are peculiarly exposed, and arrived to that first degree of strength and reason at which manhood begins, he

* A translation of this Sermon has already appeared in the English language, in a selection from Massillon's Sermons, published some time since in England, and reprinted in America. The translation here inserted was however made before that was published, and how far the language of this corresponds with that, the Translator knows not, as he never read that. It is here published on account of its peculiar excellency, and of its connection with the following Sermon of Bourdaloue on the same general subject.

appeared less liable to the sudden arrests of death; and at a time when maternal tenderness was suffered to rest, in a degree, from those anxious fears which the uncertain progress of childhood and youth produces. The neighbors, in a crowd, run to mingle their tears with those of this afflicted mother; anxious for her happiness, they endeavored to lessen her grief, and to console her by repeating those vague and common observations, to which deep sorrow never listens; with her they surround the mournful coffin; and by their presence and mourning habits endeavor to honor the dead. The funeral parade exhibits to them a melancholy spectacle; but does it instruct their hearts? They are affected,—their pity is excited; but are they, in consequence of this sight, less attached to life? And will not the remembrance of this death perish from their minds, when the funeral rites cease to affect their senses?

With similar examples before us, my brethren, we every day manifest the same thoughtless dispositions. The emotions which an unexpected death excites in our hearts are but temporary; as if the consequences of death were but of short continuance. We make many vain reflections upon the inconstancy of human affairs; but the object which affected us having once disappeared, the heart again becomes tranquil, and finds itself the same. Our projects, our cares, our earthly attachments are not less strong, than if we were laying schemes for an eternal continuance in life; and when we come from viewing a mournful spectacle where we have perhaps seen birth, youth, titles, and renown, all vanish suddenly, and lose themselves for ever in the grave, we enter again into the world, more engaged, more earnest than ever in the pursuit of those vain objects of whose nothingness and vanity we have just seen a most striking proof.

Let us now enquire into the reasons of an error so truly deplorable. Whence comes it that men reflect so little upon death; and that the thought of it

makes such transient impressions upon them? These are the reasons: The uncertainty of death flatters us, and drives the recollection of it from our minds: The certainty of death affrightens us, and obliges us to turn from beholding the sad image: What there is uncertain in death lulls us to sleep and encourages us: What there is terrible and certain in it makes us dread to think upon the subject. What I now propose is to combat the dangerous security of the one, and the unjust fears of the other. Death is uncertain; you are therefore inconsiderate in not reflecting upon it, and in suffering yourselves to be surprised by its approach: Death is certain; you are therefore foolish in fearing to think upon it, and you ought never to drive its image from the mind. Contemplate upon death, because you know not at what hour this event will happen: Contemplate upon death, because you know you must certainly die.—This is the subject of the present discourse.

I. The first step which man takes in life is also the first towards the grave; as soon as his eyes are opened on the light, the sentence of death is pronounced against him; and as if it were a crime for him to live, that he once lives is sufficient to subject him to death. This was not the original destiny of man; the author of his being at first animated his clay with the breath of immortality; he put into man a germ of life which the revolution of times and years could never have weakened or extinguished. His work was concerted with so much order that it might have bid defiance to the lapse of ages; and nothing foreign from itself could ever have destroyed it, or altered its harmony. Sin alone withered this divine germ, disturbed this happy order, armed all creatures against man, and Adam became mortal as soon as he became a sinner. "By sin," says the Apostle, "death entered into the world."

We bring death into the world with us; in the womb of our mothers, we imbibe a slow poison which makes us languish here below, some a longer and some a shorter period, but which always ends in death. We die every day;—each instant deprives us of a portion of life, and carries us one step towards the tomb. The body perishes, health decays, every thing which surrounds us destroys us; food corrupts us; medicines weaken us; this spiritual fire, which animates us, consumes us, and all our life is but a long and painful agony. Now, in this situation, what image ought to be more familiar to man than that of death? A criminal condemned to die, wherever he casts his eyes, what can he see but this sad object? And the longer or the shorter time that we have to live, can this make so great a difference that we should consider ourselves as immortal upon earth?

It is true that the length of life is not in all the same. Some see the number of their years peacefully increase, to the most advanced age, and heirs of the blessings of ancient times, they die, full of days, surrounded by a numerous posterity; while others, cut off in the midst of their course, see, like king Hezekiah, the doors of the tomb opening for them, in the bloom of life; and may say with him, "I am deprived of the residue of my years."* In fine, there are some who do but just show themselves upon earth, who live but from morning till night, and with whom, as with the flower of the field, there is scarce any interval between the instant which sees them bloom, and that which sees them dry and disappear. The fatal moment appointed for each one is a secret, written in that eternal book, which the Lamb alone has a right to open. We all then live uncertain of the continuance of our days; and yet this uncertainty, so well suited in itself to render us

* Isaiah xxxviii. 10.

attentive to our last hour, lulls our vigilance to sleep. We forbear to think upon death, because we know not where to place it, in the different ages of life. We do not even regard old age as the remotest period at which we can arrive; and the uncertainty whether we shall reach that period, which ought, it should seem, to bound our hopes on this side of it, causes us to extend them even beyond. Our anxiety, not being able to rest upon any thing certain, is but a vague and confused emotion which fixes upon nothing at all; so that our uncertainty, which is only as to the time of death, renders us tranquil as to the final event itself?

Now I say, in the first place, my brethren, that of all dispositions this is the most inconsiderate and foolish; I appeal to yourselves. Is an event which may happen every day, more to be disregarded than one which threatens you at the expiration of a certain number of years? What! Because your soul may be demanded of you every instant, will you possess it in peace as if you were never to resign it? Because danger is always present, is attention less necessary? In what other matter, besides that of salvation, does uncertainty itself become a reason for security and negligence? Does the conduct of the servant in the gospel, who, under a pretence that his master delayed coming, and because he was ignorant of the hour of his arrival, wasted his goods, as though he were not to give an account, appear to you prudent? What other motive does Jesus Christ make use of to induce us to watch incessantly? And what is there in religion more proper to awaken our vigilance than the uncertainty of our last day?

Ah, my brethren, if the final hour was marked out to each one of us; if the kingdom of God came by observation; if at our birth we bore written on our foreheads the number of our years, and the fatal day which is to terminate them, this point of view, fixed and certain, however remote it might be, would

wholly occupy us, would disturb us, would not leave us, a tranquil moment; we should always think the time which we saw before us to be too short. The image of death, continually present to our minds, in spite of ourselves, would give us a distaste for every thing; would render pleasures insipid to us, fortune indifferent, and the world burdensome and fatiguing. The terrible moment, of which we could not lose sight, would restrain our passions,—extinguish our hatreds,—disarm our revenge,—check all irregular desires,—mingle itself in all our projects; and our lives, thus determined by a certain number of days, fixed and known, would be but a preparation for the last moment. Are we wise, my brethren? Death viewed at a distance, but at a point certain and determined, would affrighten us,—would detach us from the world and from ourselves,—would call us to God,—would occupy our thoughts incessantly; and yet, this same event, uncertain as to the time,—which may happen every day, every instant,—which may surprise us,—which may come when we think of it the least,—and which is perhaps at the door, is disregarded by us, and leaves us tranquil. What do I say? It leaves us all our passions, all our sinful attachments, all our engagedness for the world, for pleasures, for fortune; and because it is not sure whether we shall die to-day, we live as if our years upon earth were to be eternal.

Let it be further observed, my brethren, that this uncertainty is accompanied with all those circumstances which are best calculated to alarm a wise man, or at least to occupy the thoughts of one who makes any use of his reason. For,

1. The surprise which you have to fear is not one of those rare, singular events which happen to but a few unhappy persons, and which it is more prudent to disregard than to provide for. It is not that an instantaneous, sudden death may seize you,—that

the thunder of heaven may fall upon you,—that you may be buried under the ruins of your houses,—that a shipwreck may overwhelm you in the deep; nor do I speak of those misfortunes whose singularity renders them more terrible, but at the same time less to be apprehended. It is a familiar event; there is not a day but furnishes you with examples of it; almost all men are surprised by death; all see it approach when they think it most distant; all say to themselves, like the fool in the gospel: "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Thus have died your neighbors, your friends, almost all those of whose death you have been informed; all have left you in astonishment at the suddenness of their departure. You have sought reasons for it, in the imprudence of the person while sick, in the ignorance of physicians, in the choice of remedies; but the best and indeed the only reason is, that the day of the Lord always cometh by surprise.

The earth is like a large field of battle where you are every day engaged with the enemy; you have happily escaped to-day, but you have seen many lose their lives who promised themselves to escape as you have done. To-morrow you must again enter the lists; who has assured you that fortune, so fatal to others, will always be favorable to you alone? And since you must perish there at last, are you reasonable in building a firm and permanent habitation, upon the very spot which is destined to be your grave? Place yourselves in whatever situation you please, there is not a moment of time, in which death may not come, as it has to many others in similar situations. There is no action of renown which may not be terminated by the eternal darkness of the grave; Herod was cut off in the midst of the foolish applauses of his people: No public day which may not finish with your funeral pomp; Jezebel was thrown headlong from the window of her palace, the

very day that she had chosen to show herself with unusual ostentation: No delicious feast which may not bring death to you; Belshazzar lost his life when seated at a sumptuous banquet: No sleep which may not be to you the sleep of death; Holofernes, in the midst of his army, a conqueror of kingdoms and provinces, lost his life by an Israelitish woman, when asleep in his tent: No crime which may not finish your crimes; Zimri found an infamous death in the tents of the daughters of Midian: No sickness which may not terminate your days; you very often see the slightest infirmities resist all applications of the healing art, deceive the expectations of the sick, and suddenly turn to death. In a word, imagine yourselves in any circumstances of life, wherein you may ever be placed, and you will hardly be able to reckon the number of those who have been surprised by death when in like circumstances; and you have no warrant that you shall not meet with the same fate. You acknowledge this; you own it to be true; but this avowal, so terrible in itself, is only an acknowledgment which custom demands of you, but which never leads you to a single precaution to guard against the danger.

2. If this uncertainty related only to the hour, the place or the manner of your death, it would not appear so dreadful; for what imports it to a Christian, says St. Austin, whether he dies among his friends, or in a land of strangers;—on a bed of sickness, or in the bosom of the waves, provided he dies the death of the righteous? But what is really terrible is, that it is uncertain whether you will die in the Lord, or in your sins;—that you are ignorant what you will be in the other world, where your condition will be unalterably fixed;—that you are ignorant into whose hands your soul will fall when alone, a stranger and trembling, it departs from the body; whether it will be surrounded with light and borne to the feet of the

throne, on the wings of happy spirits, or enveloped in frightful darkness and precipitated into the abyss. These are the only alternatives, and which of them awaits you, you know not. Death alone will discover the secret; and can you remain tranquil while in this uncertainty? Will you heedlessly suffer the event to come, as if it would decide nothing for you? My brethren, if all was to end with our natural life, the infidel would still be wrong in saying, "let us not think of the closing scene; let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die." The more sweets he found in life, the more reason he would have to fear death, which would however be nothing to him but the extinction of his being. But for us, who profess to believe in an eternal state of rewards and punishments; —for us, whom death will surprise uncertain as to this terrible alternative, is it not folly?—What do I say?—Is it not madness, to live as if we thought like the infidel, while we do not believe in that observation of his, "let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die?" Can we be one instant without occupying our minds with that decisive moment, and without endeavoring to lessen, by the precautions of religion, that anxiety and fear which this uncertainty must cause in a soul that has not entirely renounced its eternal hopes?

3. In all other uncertainties, either the number of those who partake with us the same danger may encourage us; or certain expedients to which we flatter ourselves we can have recourse may leave us more tranquil; or, in fine, if the worst happens, the surprise will be but an instructive lesson to teach us, at our expense, to be more upon our guard in future. But in the terrible uncertainty of which we now speak, the number of those who run the same risk with us does not at all diminish ours; all the expedients with which we may flatter ourselves will prove but illusions on our death beds; in fine, the surprise of death will not be repeated. We are to die but

once; and we can derive no benefit, for another occasion, from past imprudence. The event will undecieve us, it is true; but knowledge thus obtained, though it may remove our doubts, yet having become useless by the immutability of our condition, will be but a cruel knowledge, which will torment us eternally, and be the most grievous part of our punishment, rather than cause wise reflections which may lead to repentance.

By what then will you justify this profound, incomprehensible forgetfulness in which you live, with regard to the day of death? By youth, which may seem to promise you still a long course of years? But the son of the widow of Nain was young. Does death respect ages and ranks? Youth? But this is what justly excites my fears on your account; for this period is often accompanied with licentious manners, extravagant pleasures, violent passions, the excesses of the table, the pursuits of ambition, the dangers of war, the desire of military glory, the sallies of revenge. Is it not in these bright days that the greater part of mankind finish their course? Adonijah might have lived to old age, if it had not been for his passions; Absalom, if he had been free from ambition; the son of the king of Sychem, if he had not had a criminal attachment to Dinah; Jonathan, if war had not dug a grave for him on the mountains of Gilboa. Youth?—But must we here renew the grief of the nation, and increase the tears which are still streaming? Must we irritate the wound which still bleeds, and will a long time bleed in the bosom of the great prince who now hears me?* A young princess, the delight of the Court; a young prince, the hope of the state; even the infant, the precious fruit of parental tenderness and of the public vows,—did

* This Sermon was delivered before Lewis XIV. and the French court, at a time when several children of the royal family had recently died.

not cruel death cut down all these together, in the twinkling of an eye? And this august palace, abounding but a few days before, with so much glory, majesty and magnificence, does it not seem to have become for ever a house of grief and mourning? Youth? How happy would France have been if this resource might be depended upon! Alas, this is the season of dangers, and the rock on which life is most commonly shipwrecked.

With what then will you still encourage yourselves? With the strength of your constitution? But what is the most firmly established health? A spark which a breath may extinguish. One day of infirmity is sufficient to destroy the most robust body. I need not then enquire whether you are not deceiving yourselves in that respect? Whether a constitution injured by the irregularities of your early years does not announce death to be nigh? Whether habitual infirmities have not already opened the doors of the tomb for you? Or whether certain melancholy indications do not threaten you with some sudden accident? Suppose your days to be prolonged even beyond your hopes. Alas, my brethren, can that which is ever to end appear long to you? Look back upon your past lives. Where are your first years? What have they left in your remembrance which is real? Nothing more than the dream of a night. You dream that you have lived; this is all there is left to you. All that interval of time which has elapsed from your birth to the present day has passed like a swift arrow whose rapidity almost eludes the sight. If you had begun to live at the creation of the world, the past would not appear to you longer, or more real. All the ages which have run on to the present, you would regard like fugitive moments. The numerous multitudes, who have appeared and disappeared on the earth; all the revolutions of empires and kingdoms; all those great events which embellish our histories, would appear to you but like the different scenes of

a play, which successively terminate in an hour. Recall to mind the victories, the captures of places, the honorable treaties, the magnificent and pompous events of the first years of this reign; they are recent; the most of you have not only been spectators of them, but have partaken in their danger and glory; they will be handed down, in our annals, to our latest posterity; but with you they are already no more than a dream,—a transient blaze of light, which has disappeared, and which every day effaces more thoroughly from the memory. What then is the little of the journey of life which remains? Can we believe that the days to come will have more reality than those which are passed? Years appear long when contemplated at a distance; when arrived, they disappear, they fly from us in an instant; and soon, very soon, shall we find ourselves, as by enchantment, at the fatal term of our days, which now appears far off, and as if never to arrive. Consider the world as you saw it in the morning of your lives, and as you now see it. A new Court has succeeded that which you saw in early life; new characters have ascended the stage; the great parts are filled by new actors. New events, new intrigues, new passions, new heroes in virtue and vice, are at present the subjects of the praises, the derisions, the censures of the public. A new world is insensibly raised, and without your having perceived it, upon the ruins of the old. Every thing passes with you and like you; a rapidity, which nothing can arrest, hurries every thing into the abyss of eternity; our ancestors yesterday left the way to us, and we shall to-morrow leave it to those who will come after us. Age succeeds to age; "the fashion of the world passes away" incessantly; the living continually succeed to the places of the dead; nothing is permanent; every thing changes; every thing decays; every thing wastes away. God alone remains always the same; the torrent of ages, which sweeps away mankind,

runs before his eyes, and he sees with indignation weak mortals, who are carried along by this rapid torrent, insult him as they pass; wishing to derive all their happiness from the present moment; and at the end fall into the hands of his wrath and vengeance.

And what impression, my brethren, is made upon us by the instability of every thing here below; by the death of our neighbors, our friends, our competitors, our rulers? We do not reflect that we are soon to follow them; we think but of clothing ourselves in their spoils; we forget the little time they have enjoyed them, and remember only the pleasure they had in possessing them; we are eager to profit by the ruins of each other; we resemble those foolish soldiers, who, in the height of battle, and at a time when their companions are falling around them on every side, under the fire and sword of their enemies, greedily seize the ornaments of the dead, and hardly have they put them on, before a mortal stroke takes from them their life, and those foolish ornaments with which they had just decorated themselves. So the son clothes himself in the spoils of his father,—closes his eyes,—succeeds to his rank, his fortune, his dignities,—conducts the pomp of his funeral, and retires from the scene, more engaged and more interested with the new titles with which he is invested, than instructed by the last advice of a dying father,—afflicted by his loss,—or in the least detached from things here below, by a sight which has just presented to his eyes their vanity, and forcibly announced to him the same destiny. The death of our neighbors is not more instructive to us; one leaves a post vacant, and we press on to obtain it; another advances us one degree in rank; with this one are ended all those pretensions which incommoded us; that one leaves us the ear and the favor of our sovereign, and he alone stood in competition with us; another, in fine, places within our reach some dignified office,

and opens the way for us to a point of elevation, to which we could not have pretended while he was living; and thereupon we encourage ourselves, we adopt new measures, we form new projects; and instead of undeceiving ourselves, by the example of those who have just disappeared from our eyes, there even spring from their ashes fatal sparks which again enkindle all our desires, all our attachments to the world; and death, that sad image of our misery, death encourages more passions among men than even all the illusions of life. What is there then which can detach us from this miserable world, since death itself serves but to bind our chains the tighter, and confirm us in the error which attaches us to its scenes?

On this subject, my brethren, I demand nothing of you but what reason dictates. What are the natural consequences which common sense should teach us to draw from the uncertainty of death?

1. The hour of death is uncertain; every year, every day, every moment may be the last. It is then a mark of folly to attach one's self to any thing which may pass away in an instant, and by that means lose the only blessing which will never fail. Whatever, therefore, you do solely for this world should appear lost to you; since you have here no sure hold of any thing; you can place no dependence on any thing; and you can carry nothing away but what you treasure up for heaven. The kingdoms of the world, and all their glory, ought not to balance a moment the interests of your eternal state; since a large fortune, and an elevated rank will not assure to you a longer life than an inferior situation; and since they will produce only a more bitter chagrin on your death beds, when you are about to be separated from them for ever. All your cares, all your pursuits, all your desires ought, then, to center in securing a durable interest, an eternal happiness, which no person can ravish from you.

2. The hour of death is uncertain: You ought then to die every day;—not to indulge yourselves in an action in which you would be unwilling to be surprised;—to consider all your pursuits as the pursuits of a dying man, who every moment expects his soul will be demanded of him;—to perform all your works as if you were that instant to render an account of them;—and since you cannot answer for the time which is to come, so to regulate the present that you may have no need of the future to make reparation.

3. In fine, The hour of death is uncertain: Do not then defer repentance; do not delay to turn to the Lord; the business requires haste. You cannot assure yourselves even of one day; and yet you put off a preparation for death to a distant and uncertain futurity. If you had imprudently swallowed a mortal poison, would you delay to some future time to apply a remedy which was at hand, and which alone could preserve life? Would the death which you carried in your own bosom admit of delay and remissness? This is precisely your condition. If you are wise, take immediate precaution. You carry death in your souls, since you carry sin there. Hasten then to apply a remedy; every instant is precious to him who cannot assure himself of a single one. The poisonous draught which infects your soul will not permit you to continue long; the goodness of God as yet offers you a remedy; hasten then to improve it, while time is allowed you. Can there be need of exhortations to induce you to resolve upon this? Ought it not to suffice that the benefit of the cure is pointed out to you? Would it be necessary to exhort an unfortunate man, borne on the billows, to make efforts to save himself from destruction? Ought you then to have need of our ministrations on this subject? Your last hour is just at hand; in the twinkling of an eye you are to appear before the tribunal of your God. You may usefully employ the

moment which remains. The most of those who die daily under your eyes, suffer that moment to pass, and die without improving it. You imitate their negligence; the same fate awaits you; like them, you will die before you have begun to lead better lives. They were warned of their danger, and you also are warned; their unhappy lot makes no impression upon you, and the death which awaits you will have no more effect upon those who shall survive. There is a succession of blindness which passes from parents to children, and which is perpetuated on the earth; all determine to reform their lives, and yet most people die before they commence the work of reformation.

Such, my brethren, are the wise and natural reflections which the uncertainty of our last hour should excite in the mind. But if, on account of the uncertainty attendant upon death, you are inexcuseable in not occupying your thoughts any more with it, than if it were never to come; what there is terrible and frightful in it, on account of its certainty, still less excuses your folly in putting this sad image to a distance, as though it were calculated to disturb the repose and poison all the sweets of life. This is to be the subject of the next head of discourse.

II. Man loves not to occupy his mind with his own nothingness and meanness; every thing which recalls his attention to his origin, reminds him also of his end; wounds his pride; interests his self-love; attacks the foundation of his passions; and throws him into dark and mournful reflections. To die,—to be separated from all surrounding objects,—to enter into the abyss of eternity,—to become a carcass the food for worms, the horror of men, the hideous deposit of a tomb,—all the senses rise against this idea; it disturbs reason, blackens the imagination, poisons all the sweets of life. We dare not fix our attention on an object so frightful; we put the

thought at a distance, as the most sad and the most bitter of all; we fear, we fly from every thing which recalls the remembrance of it, as if it would hasten our last hour. Under a pretence of tenderness, we do not even love that people should speak to us of dear friends whom death has ravished from us. Care is taken to remove from us the view of those places in which they dwelt; those paintings where their features are still living; and every thing which could awaken in our minds, with the recollection of them, the idea of death which removed them from us. Nay further, we even dread to hear mournful reports; we extend our fears, in this respect, to the most puerile superstition; we think we every where behold unfortunate presages of our own death; in the reveries of a dream, in the nocturnal singing of a bird, in an accidental number of guests, and in events still more ridiculous; we think we every where see death, and for that very reason endeavor to banish it from our minds.

Now, such excessive fears, my hearers, are pardonable in Pagans, to whom death is the greatest of misfortunes, since they expect nothing beyond the grave; and since, living without hope, they die without consolation. But it may well excite surprise that death should be so terrible to Christians; and that the terror of this image should even serve as an excuse for them to put the thoughts of it at a distance. For,

1. Suppose that you have reason to fear this last hour; yet, as it is certain, I do not comprehend why, because it appears terrible, you ought not therefore to think of it before its arrival. On the contrary, it appears to me that the more terrible a misfortune is with which you are threatened, the more you ought to keep it in sight, and incessantly adopt such measures as that it may not come upon you by surprise. What! The more danger alarms and terrifies you, shall it therefore render you more indolent and inat-

tentive? Should the extravagant terrors of your imagination restrain you from that wise fear which works salvation? And because you fear too much will you wholly forbear to reflect on the subject? But what man is he whom too lively an idea of danger calms and encourages? What! If you were obliged to walk in a narrow, steep bye-path, surrounded on all sides with precipices, would you order your eyes to be bound, that you might not see your danger, and from a fear that the depth of the abyss might make you giddy? Ah, my dear hearers, you see your graves open at your feet; this frightful object alarms you; but instead of having recourse to religion, for those wise precautions which it offers you, to prevent your falling unawares into the pit, you blindfold yourselves that you may not see it; you contrive diverting scenes to efface the idea of it from your minds; and, like the unfortunate victims of paganism, you run to the funeral pile, with your eyes bound, crowned with garlands, in the midst of dancings and shouts of joy, that you may not think upon the fatal moment to which this pomp is to conduct you, and from a fear of seeing the altar on which you are instantly to be sacrificed.

2. If by putting this thought at a distance you could also put death at a distance, your fears would then have some excuse. But whether you think of it or not, death continually approaches; every effort which you make to remove the recollection of it from you, brings you nearer to it; and at the appointed hour it will come. What do you gain then by turning your minds from this thought? Do you lessen the danger? You increase it; you render surprise inevitable. Do you alleviate the horror of the spectacle by hiding it from your sight? Ah, you still leave it all its terrors. If you rendered the thought of death more familiar, your minds, weak and feeble as they are, would insensibly become accustomed to it; you

could, by little and little, fix your attention upon the subject; and with less anxiety, you might contemplate the closing scene, and look upon the bed of death; it would be no longer a new sight to you.

3. But, admitting this thought should trouble you,—should make impressions of fear and sadness upon you, what inconvenience would result from this? Are you placed upon earth only to live in an indolent calm, and to occupy your minds with none but pleasant and cheerful objects? We should lose our reason, you say, if we were to think closely upon death. You would lose your reason! What? Have the many pious people who mingle this thought with all their actions, and who, from reflecting on their last hour, learn to restrain their passions, and derive the most powerful motive to fidelity,—have the saints who, like the Apostle, die daily that they may not die eternally,—have all these lost their reason?—You would lose your reason!—That is to say, you would regard this world as a state of banishment; pleasures, as intoxicating; sin, as the greatest of evils; places, honors, favor, fortune, as dreams; and salvation, as the great, the only business of life. Happy folly! I wish that from this day you might all be of the number of those thus wisely bereft of reason! You would lose your reason!—Yes, that false, worldly, proud, carnal, foolish reason which seduces you;—that corrupt reason which obscures faith, which authorizes the indulgence of passion, which makes people prefer time to eternity, a shadow to a substance, and which leads all men astray;—that deplorable reason, that vain philosophy, which considers the fear of an hereafter as a weakness, and which, because it fears it too much, pretends or endeavors not to believe it.

But that wise, enlightened, moderated, Christian reason,—that *wisdom of the serpent*, so much recom-

mended in the gospel, it is in the remembrance of death that that is to be found;—that wisdom, preferable, says the Holy Ghost, to all the treasures, and to all the honors of the world;—that wisdom, so honorable to man, and which elevates him so much above himself;—that wisdom, which has formed so many Christian heroes; it is the continual presence of the image of your last hour which will embellish your souls with that.

But you add, if any one should undertake to reflect deeply on this subject, and to occupy his mind with it continually, it would tend to make him abandon every worldly object, and form resolutions of violent and excessive austerity. That is to say, it would detach him from the world, from his vices, from his passions, from his infamous irregularities, and make him lead a regular and Christian life, which alone is worthy of reason. This is what the world calls violent and excessive austerity!

Further, under an idea of avoiding pretended excess, will you not form even the most necessary resolutions? You ought continually to begin anew; the first transports soon abate, and it is much easier to moderate the excesses of piety, than to invigorate languor and sloth. However, you have nothing to fear from excessive fervor, and from the transports of zeal; you will never go too far on that side. You do not know yourselves; you have not yet experienced what obstacles all your inclinations will oppose to the most common duties of religion. You have only to guard against lukewarmness and indifference; this is the only rock you have to fear. Call to mind the history of Peter, who was ordered by his Lord to put up his sword, as if his zeal had carried him too far; who yet, immediately after this, fell into the great sin of denying his Lord, and found in his cowardice, a temptation which it seemed was not to be feared but from his fervor and courage. What illusion! For fear of doing too much for God, we do no-

thing ; the fear of bestowing too much attention to our salvation hinders us from engaging in it at all ; and we lose ourselves, from a fear of too surely saving ourselves. We fear the chimerical excesses of religion, while we do not fear being entirely destitute of all religion, and even despising it. Does the fear of exerting yourselves too much for your fortune and elevation in life, or of pushing them too far, stop you ? Does this cool the ardor of your pursuits and of your ambition ? Is it not rather the hope of success which supports and animates you ? Nothing is too much for the world, while every thing for God is thought excessive austerity. People reproach themselves, and fear they do not take pains enough to acquire an earthly fortune ; while they make no exertions to obtain an heavenly inheritance, from a pretended fear of going too far.

4. But I add that it discovers a criminal ingratitude in you towards God, to put far off the thought of death, solely because it gives you anxiety and alarms you ; for this impression of fear and terror is a singular favor which God confers upon you. Alas ! How many impious wretches are there who despise death ; who assume to themselves a frightful merit in seeing it approach with firmness, and who regard it as the entire extinction of their being ? How many wise and learned philosophers are there in Christian lands, all whose reflections and superior understandings are directed to this point, to view the approaches of death with tranquillity ; who spend their whole lives in reasoning, to acquire, in their last moments, a constancy and serenity of mind as puerile as the most vulgar fears ; and who thus make a most insensible use of reason ? How many men are there who, foolishly fond of valor and glory, in the midst of combats, rush on to danger, as to a public show, without remorse, without inquietude, without reflecting upon the consequences ? How many sinners are

there in the tranquillity of cities, and in the indolence of private life, who, given up to hardness of heart and to a reprobate mind, are no longer affected with this image? In fine, how many are there who, in consequence of a disposition too lively, too frivolous, too light, and little adapted to mournful and serious reflections, pass their whole lives without once thinking that they are to die? It is then a singular favor which God confers upon you, by giving this thought so much influence and ascendancy over your souls; this is probably the way by which he is desirous to bring you back to him; if you ever leave your sinful practices, it will be in consequence of this; your salvation appears dependent on this remedy. What do you do then, by putting this thought to a distance, because it excites salutary fears? You deprive yourselves of the only assistance which can facilitate your return to God; you render useless a favor which is suited to your case; you seem to think hard of God that he has conferred this favor upon you; and you even reproach yourselves for being too much affected with it. Tremble, my dear hearers, lest your hearts should become insensible to these salutary fears; lest you should view with a tranquil eye the most mournful spectacles; lest God should take from you this mean of salvation; and lest he should harden you against all the terrors of religion. A benefit, not only despised but even considered as an evil, is soon followed with the indignation, or at least with the disaffection of the benefactor. Then the idea of death will no longer excite any apprehensions; you will run to a scene of pleasure as soon as you come from a funeral; you will even become so hardened as to boast of being above vulgar fears, and applaud yourselves for a change so terrible for your salvation.

While, therefore, God continues this tenderness of conscience to you, endeavor to improve it to the regulation of your morals; bring those objects nigh to

you which are calculated deeply to impress this image on your minds, whilst it still has power to disturb the false peace of your passions. Sometimes visit the tombs of your ancestors, to meditate, in presence of their sleeping dust, upon the vanity of things here below; interrogate them upon what remains with them, of their pleasures, their dignity, and their glory, in this dark retreat of the dead; open their mournful sepulchres, and see what they now retain of what they formerly were in the eyes of men; see what they now are;—spectres, whose presence you cannot bear; heaps of worms and putrefaction! This is what they are in the view of men; but what are they before God! Descend yourselves, in imagination, into those abodes of horror and infection, and there choose your places beforehand; represent yourselves in your last hour, stretched on a bed of sickness, having already entered the lists with death; your limbs stiff, and seized with a mortal coldness; your tongue bound in the chains of death; your eyes fixed, immoveable, covered with a confused cloud, before which every thing begins to disappear; your neighbors and friends around you, making useless prayers for your health, redoubling your fears and regrets, by the tenderness of their sighs, and the abundance of their tears; and the minister of religion by your side, pointing out to you the only way of salvation. Bring this sight, so interesting and instructive, near to view; consider yourselves in the terrible struggles of this last combat, exhibiting no signs of life except in the convulsions which precede death; all the world become nothing with regard to you; spoiled for ever of your dignities and your titles; accompanied with your own works only, and about to appear before God. This is not a fiction; it is the history of those who die daily before your eyes; it is yours in anticipation. Reflect on the terrible moment; it will come some time or other,

and the day may not be far distant; nay perhaps it is just at hand. But it will certainly come at last, and however remote it may be, it will be like to-morrow; the interval yet to elapse will seem like an instant; and the only consolation you can then have will be to have made a preparation for death the study of your lives.

5. Lastly, look back to the source of these excessive fears, which render the image and the thought of death so terrible to you, and you will without doubt find it in the trouble of a guilty conscience. It is not death which you fear, it is the justice of God which awaits you beyond that period, to punish you for your unbelief and manifold transgressions; it is because you are afraid to present yourselves before him, covered with so many shameful wounds which disfigure his image in you; and because for you to die in your present situation would be to perish eternally. Purify then your consciences,—recall God to your hearts; present nothing to his view meriting his anger and his punishment; put yourselves in a condition to hope something from his infinite mercy after death; then you will see this last moment approach with less fear and amazement; and the sacrifice which you will already have made to God of the world and your passions, will not only facilitate, but render even sweet and consoling, the sacrifice which you are then to make of your lives.

Now, my brethren, what is there in death terrible to a believer? From what does it separate him? From a world, which must perish and which is the portion of the reprobate;—from his riches, which embarrassed him, the use of which was attended with danger, and which he was forbidden to make subservient to his present interests;—from his neighbors and friends, whom he precedes but a short time, and who will very soon follow him;—from his body, which had been a perpetual source of sin, and an ob-

stacle to his holy desires; from his masters and from his servants, the former of whom often exacted of him a criminal compliance with their wishes, and the latter rendered him responsible for many of their sins;—from his offices and dignities, which, by multiplying his duties, augmented his dangers;—in fine, from life, which to him was but an exile, and from which he had a desire to be delivered. What does death give him for that which it takes from him? It gives him eternal pleasures, which he will taste without fear and without bitterness;—unfading blessings, which no one can ravish from him;—the sure and peaceable enjoyment of God, of which he can no more be deprived; a deliverance from all his passions, which had been to him a continual source of inquietude and pain;—an unalterable peace, which he was never able to find in this world;—the dissolution of all the chains which bound him to the earth, and detained him here as a captive;—in fine, the society of holy and happy beings, instead of that of sinful men from which he is now separated.

And what is there, O my God, in this world, sufficiently agreeable to a believer to attach him to life? It is to him a vale of tears, where dangers are numerous, combats daily, victories rare, and falling into sins inevitable;—where there must be unremitted watchfulness and engagedness;—where the bodily appetites and passions must be continually mortified;—where worldly enjoyments constantly hold out alluring temptations, and yet are forbidden;—where that which naturally pleases the most is the most to be avoided and feared;—in a word, where, if you do not suffer, if you do not weep, if you do not resist unto blood, if you do not war incessantly, if you do not even hate yourselves, you are lost. What is there then in this life sufficiently amiable and attractive to interest the affections of a truly pious Christian? And must it not be a triumph and a gain to him to die?

Thus, my brethren, death is the only point of view, the only consolation which can support the righteous. Do they groan under affliction? They know that their end is nigh; that the short and transitory tribulations of this life will be followed with an eternal weight of glory; and in this thought they find an inexhaustible source of patience, of firmness, and of cheerfulness. Do they feel the law of their members warring against the law of their minds, and exciting in them emotions which endanger their fidelity, and well nigh cause their feet to slip? They are not ignorant that after the dissolution of their earthly house they will be made heavenly and spiritual; and that being delivered from all these evils they will then become like the Angels of Heaven. The recollection of these things sustains and fortifies them. Are they oppressed with the weight of Christ's yoke? Is their weak faith upon the point of yielding, or sinking under the weight of the austere duties of the gospel? The day of the Lord is not far off; their blessed recompense is at hand; and the end of their course, which they already see, animates them and gives them new strength. Hear how the Apostle consoled the primitive believers. "Brethren," said he to them, "the time is short, the day approaches, the Lord is at the door, and he will not long delay; rejoice then, again I say, rejoice." This was all the consolation of those men when they were persecuted, injured, proscribed, trodden under foot, considered as the offscouring of the world, the opprobrium of Jews, and the laughing stock of Gentiles. They knew that death would dry up their tears; that then there would be no more sorrow, or grief, or suffering; that every thing would be new; and this thought mitigated all their pains. Ah! If any one had told these valiant confessors of the faith, that the Lord would not make them taste death, and that he would leave them to live eternally upon earth, this would have staggered their faith,

tempted their constancy, and by taking from them the hope of future happiness, would have deprived them of all their consolation.

You will perhaps say, you are not surprised at this, because to men afflicted and unhappy as they were death must have appeared a refuge. You mistake, my brethren. It was not their persecutions and sufferings which constituted their unhappiness and grief. These were their joy, their consolation, and their glory: "We glory in tribulations," said they. It was the distance at which they still lived from Jesus Christ. This was the source of their tears, and the only thing which rendered death so desirable to them. Whilst we are in the body, said the Apostle, we are absent from the Lord; and this absence rendered the condition of those faithful men grievous and hard to be borne. True piety will lead us to wish a re-union with Christ our chief, and to sigh after the happy moment which will incorporate us with all the elect, in that mystical body which was formed from the foundation of the world, from every language, tribe, and nation; which is the end of all the designs of God, and which will glorify him with Jesus Christ for ever. True Christians, while here below, are like branches separated from their vine; like rivers at a distance from their fountain; like strangers wandering far from their country; like captives chained in a prison waiting for their deliverance; like children banished from the house of their father; in one word, like members separated from their body. Since Christ their chief is ascended into heaven, they consider the earth as no longer the place of their abode; they wait for the blessed hope and coming of their Lord. This desire constitutes their piety and their consolation; and for a Christian not to long for this happy moment, but to fear it, and to regard it as the greatest of misfortunes, is to pronounce an anathema against his Lord;—to desire to have no part with him;—to renounce the promises of faith, and

the glorious title of a citizen of heaven ;—to seek his happiness upon earth ;—to deny a future state ;—to regard religion as a dream ;—and to believe that death will terminate his existence.

No my brethren ; death has nothing but what is sweet and desirable to a pious man. Arrived at that happy moment, he sees, without regret, a world perish which had never appeared to him but as vanity, and which he had never loved ; his eyes are closed, with pleasure, on all those vain spectacles which the earth affords, which he had ever regarded as the decorations of a moment, and whose dangerous illusions he had never ceased to fear. He perceives without regret,—what do I say ?—he perceives with pleasure, this mortal body, which had been the source of all his temptations, and the fatal cause of all his weaknesses, clothed with immortality ; he regrets nothing upon earth where he leaves nothing, and from which his attachment flies with his soul ; he does not even complain of being cut off in the midst of his course, and of finishing his days in an age still flourishing. On the contrary, he thanks his deliverer for having abridged his pains with his years ; for not having exacted from him but the half of his debt, as the price of his immortality ; and for having consummated his sacrifice in so short a time, fearing that a longer continuance in a corrupt world would have perverted his heart. His zeal, his mortification and self-denial, which had cost the weakness of the flesh so much, then afford him the greatest consolation ; he sees that every thing vanishes except what he has done for God ; that every thing forsakes him, his fortune, his neighbors, his friends, his dignities,—every thing but his own actions ; and he is transported with joy that he has not put his confidence in the favor of princes, in the children of men, in the vain hopes of fortune, in any thing which could perish ; but in the Lord alone, who continues eternally the same, and in a near communion with whom he will

shortly find that peace and happiness which creatures cannot give.

Thus, tranquil with respect to what is past, disregarding the present, transported with joy that he has at last arrived upon the borders of that future state which was the object of his desires; seeing the bosom of Abraham already open to receive him, and the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Father, holding in his hands the crowns of immortality, he sleeps in the Lord, and is borne by blessed spirits to the abode of the saints,—to mansions of eternal bliss. May you, my brethren, thus see your earthly course terminate! This is what I wish you all.—Amen.

Sermon V.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

BY L. BOURDALOUE.

LUKE VII. 12, 13.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.

IN this passage of scripture, my hearers, many interesting circumstances are mentioned;—a mother who has lost her son, and who is thus deprived of her most pleasing hope;—a young man taken away in the flower of his age,—an only son, the sole heir of his family, suddenly cut off from all his expectations;—and a crowd of people accompanying the corpse to the grave, and taking part in this funeral ceremony. These were circumstances calculated to touch the Saviour of men; and it was impossible that a God of love and mercy should not be moved with so mournful a retinue, with a sight so worthy of pity. But other objects affected him still more sensibly. The loss of a son, the grief of a mother, the death of an heir, the desolate situation of a widow, —these were considerations drawn wholly from this world; and what gave our Lord greater pain than

any of these, was the excessive though natural attachment of this mother to her son; the want of piety in this woman, who looked upon death not with the eye of faith, but with the eye of sense; and the unhappy condition of this young man, who had been surprised by an unexpected death for which he was not prepared.

Now, to confine myself to this last idea, which appears to me the most essential and the most important, is it not thus that many die every day; that is, without having thought of death, without being prepared for the closing scene? And what is there more deplorable than the situation of a man who finds himself at this last moment when he least expects it; and who has made no preparation for an event the consequences of which are eternal? It is then of the greatest moment, my dear hearers, that you learn to prevent so dreadful a danger; and for this reason I propose to discourse to you at present concerning a preparation for death.

St. Chrysostom, in the rules which he has given for the conduct of life, makes a preparation for death consist particularly in three things: A persuasion of the certainty of death: Watchfulness against being surprised by death: And, that practical acquaintance with death, which consists in dying daily to the world, or in making of life itself a continual apprenticeship to death.

What excites compassion in the Son of God in relation to us is that though we fear death, to a great degree, we nevertheless live in an entire negligence, and profound forgetfulness of that period. We fear death; and yet however certain, and even near it may be, we are scarce ever persuaded that we must certainly die. We fear death; and yet however uncertain, in some respects, it may be, and however liable we are to be deceived and surprised by it, we take as little precaution as if we were fully instructed as to the time and manner of our death. In fine, we

fear death; and yet, notwithstanding the daily and sensible experience we have of death, we never really learn to die. To the illustration of these three points your attention is now called.

I. It is in a persuasion of the certainty of death that a preparation for that important event must begin. For it is difficult for us seriously to prepare for any things of the certainty of which we are not fully persuaded; and if it is to be attended with consequences so irreparable and so terrible as death, it is not possible, if we are strongly persuaded of it, that we should not apply ourselves to prepare for it, with all our power. Do not consider what I shall now say to you, my hearers, as paradoxical, or as affording no instruction; and do not reply,—Death is so certain that there is nothing of which men, in spite of themselves, are more fully convinced. For I assert, on the contrary, that there is nothing, or almost nothing, of which they are less so. This is a truth which may surprise you, and which I should not myself comprehend, if I did not know in what sense it is to be understood; still it is a certain truth of which I hope to convince you.

It is true, my brethren, we are all persuaded that a sentence of death is decreed against sinful man in the sovereign tribunal of a just God; and that this sentence is irrevocable and without appeal. But by a certain enchantment of our self love, we insensibly forget that this sentence is to be executed upon us; and we live, in effect, as if we were persuaded that we are never to die. We know well as a general truth, that all men are mortal; but by a thousand illusions, and a thousand false hopes which deceive us, whatever may be the general truth, we always make a particular exception in favor of ourselves. Or, to speak more properly, though we have a speculative evidence and conviction that we ourselves shall die, yet a thousand practical errors make us

believe that we shall not die. That is to say, we readily acknowledge that we shall one day die, that this is a severe law, to which we must at last submit; but we console ourselves with the thought that it will not be soon, that we have much time still left, that our hour is not yet come; and this persuasion prevents our cultivating that lively sense of the approach of death, and those dispositions which are necessary to prepare us for the solemn period. For observe, my hearers, that what will lead us to prepare for a happy death is not simply to believe, as a speculative truth, that we must die; but to be deeply affected and penetrated with this sentiment: I shall die, and my hour approaches; I shall die, and this will happen in some one of those years which I am promising myself in vain; I shall die, and this will happen at that time, and in that manner, which I the least thought of. This would lead us firmly to adopt the noble resolution of reforming our lives, of thinking seriously and efficaciously upon death.

To what measures then does the enemy of our salvation have recourse? Hear, my brethren, the most dangerous artifice which he makes use of to keep us in impenitence. He leaves to us all those thoughts concerning death which he knows we should not improve to any good purpose; and takes from us that which alone would be capable of exciting us to serious consideration. He does not attempt to persuade us we shall never die. This would be too gross an error, and one of which indeed he has no need in order to destroy us; but he persuades us that we shall not die to-day, nor to-morrow, nor for a long time yet to come, and this suffices him. For never calculating upon death as near at hand, we neglect to draw those salutary consequences from its certainty which would lead us to repentance. It is in this sense that St. Chrysostom applies those words in Genesis, "Ye shall not surely die." The remark of that Father is worthy of our attention. He

observes that the devil, that lying spirit, in order to seduce us, daily employs the same stratagem which he used in the terrestrial paradise, against our first parents; and that when he designs either to lead us to commit sin, or to induce us to defer repentance, one of the most common methods by which he attains his object is to suggest to us, as he did to the first man and woman, that we shall not surely die. But how can he blind us in this respect? If God had not told us in his word, if reason did not convince us, would not experience alone be more than sufficient to force us to believe that we shall die? What probability is there that on this subject we can be made to contradict not only our religion and our reason, but the incontestible and evident testimony of our senses? It was not so astonishing that our first father should fall into such a snare; for he had not seen any instance of death, and in consequence of the happy state of holiness in which God had created him, he enjoyed uninterrupted health. Therefore, feeling no weakness which could warn him of mortality, he might the more easily suffer himself to be deceived by the vain promise of the tempter, and flatter himself that he should not die. But to say to us, my hearers, to us whose eyes are continually struck with the image of death,—whom death surrounds on all sides,—who see it in others, and who, by our infirmities, already feel the sad proofs of it in ourselves,—to say to us, "You shall not die;" this is the last temptation by which it would seem the devil would attack us, and still less deceive us. It is nevertheless that by which he the oftenest attacks us; and what is still more strange, it is that by which he succeeds the best. The artifice is gross, I acknowledge; but our blindness, in being deceived by it, is the more deplorable. And yet this is every moment the case. For our great adversary, who continually seeks our ruin, and who knows our weak side, has only to take us by that, and to say to us; "You shall not yet die;"

and we believe him. He has only to suggest to us that we are young; that there is no need of haste; that we shall hereafter have leisure to think upon ourselves; without further examination we credit his suggestions, and securely live in sin, indulging ourselves in the irregularities of a worldly life. Why? Because we are never persuaded, I mean efficaciously so, that we must die.

It seems that in this respect there is a secrect understanding between us and our great enemy. For instead of being ever firmly persuaded of the certainty of death, we wish not to be,—we fear to be,—we put out of view all those objects which might serve to convince us; and those prospects of death which ought to be the means of our sanctification do commonly but trouble us, grieve us, astonish us, or even sometimes irritate us, when at the approach of our last hour, any thing is said to us on the subject, and the least proposition made to us referring to the danger of our situation.

Hence it happens that most men close their lives without really believing that they shall die, and almost with a presumptuous assurance that they shall not. Hence it happens that those to whom there certainly and evidently remain but a few days of life, are however the very persons who labor the most for life. How many people are there, who, struck with a mortal malady, and already given over by public opinion, form designs, engage in enterprises, and disquiet themselves with a thousand temporal affairs as if they had the greatest concern in future worldly events? How many old men are there, who, borne down with a weight of years, and having but one step more to take to the grave, are as greedy after the things of the world, as if they were to posses them for ages?

Hence it happens that the great, by a fatality, if I dare to say it, attached to their condition, never know their situation in this respect; not even when they are at the moment of death; and this because all who

come near them are prepossessed with the idea that they wish not to know it. Every one conspires to deceive them, at a time when it is most important to open their eyes. People assure them that every thing appears in their favor, when it is evident that every appearance is against them; they congratulate them upon any slight alteration in their case seemingly for the better, and upon a change which may be favorable in appearance, but which is in reality only the last effort of sinking nature; they industriously, and with great care, conceal from them all the marks and presages which are discovered in them of certain death; they exaggerate to them the power and efficacy of medicines, without ever speaking to them of the sovereign remedy, which is repentance. In this manner every one deceives them; and from what motives? From motives wholly worldly; a wife from excess of tenderness; children from respect or interest; strangers from complaisance; domestics from fear;—so that they are always ignorant of the truth, and even when dying are still sure that they shall not die.

Hence it happens that those who, from their station and from the peculiar duties of their profession, ought to undeceive people in this respect, and to speak with less reserve, have so much difficulity to explain themselves. They rely upon one another to do this, the physician upon the clergyman who at this hour is called in, and the clergyman upon the physician; neither of them being willing, to be the messenger of important, though painful and distressing tidings, which, however, God has committed to them to deliver; and thus they sacrifice to weak considerations the salvation of a soul, whose eternal destiny depended, in some measure, upon their faithfulness. Hence come so many precautions, so many disguises, so many evasions, in the last extremity, when it is thought necessary to press upon a sick man an attention to prayer, and religious

duties, as a preparation for death. People assure him, that he need not yet despair ; that though he is exhorted to those religious duties, it is not because he is thought to be so dangerous as to admit of no longer delay ; but that it is good to be prepared in season, that thus the mind may be at rest ; that is to say, they take from him one of the most powerful motives to repentance, and perhaps the only one capable of affecting him, namely a near view of the judgment of God.

It was not thus that the prophet Isaiah conducted, when, in the name of the Lord, and with a holy boldness, he warned the king of Judah that his end approached, and that it was necessary for him to prepare himself to go to render an account to the sovereign judge. "Set thine house in order ; for thou shalt die and not live." He pronounced this sentence without any softening. Thou shalt die. He had no regard, either to the royal grandeur of Hezekiah, or to the agitation into which this denunciation of death might throw him. Thou shalt die, O Prince, though a monarch and absolute in power. Ah, my hearers, where do we find in these times, such prophets, I do not say for kings and crowned heads, but even for persons in other stations ; especially for those who have any distinction in the world, of birth or rank ?

It is not astonishing that people should die, by unforeseen and singular events, without being sensible that they are near death. Such instances are terrible judgments of God, wherein, for the punishment of sinners, he suffers death to surprise them in their sins. But it is not of such events that I am now speaking. What I cannot sufficiently deplore, nor enough condemn, is that dying people, whom God is calling from life in the most common methods,—those to whom death leaves, even to the last sigh, the free exercise of reason,—those in whose favor divine justice relaxes from its demands, in accommodating

itself to their necessities, and giving them leisure to think of their situation,—that such should die, after all this, without being persuaded of the absolute certainty and near approach of death ;—and that this want of persuasion is not the effect of the rigorous vengeance of heaven, which is thus chastising them, nor of an unexpected event which disconcerts them, but of an inconceivable obstinacy which blinds them ; that we attempt to deceive and seduce ourselves, believing things to be not as they really are, but as it would please us they should be ; that we should thus conduct appears to me worthy not only of compassion but of indignation.

Now what is the remedy for this, my hearers ?—It is, in the first place, habitually to cherish in our minds a general persuasion of the certainty of death, which may rectify all our particular errors ; that is to say, to our presumptuous assurance respecting death we should continually oppose the lively idea of death. We should often recall to our minds this salutary thought, I shall die,—and I shall die in some one of those moments in which I could not have believed I was to die. Thus the oracles of truth have taught me ; and wo is me ! if, notwithstanding the express words of the holy scriptures, notwithstanding the solemn denunciation of Christ, I am not yet persuaded of this. It was this remembrance of death which Moses so much enjoined upon the people of God, being convinced that that nation, inconstant and indocile as they naturally were, would be obedient, while they should have that object present before their eyes. " Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end !"*

Secondly, We should endeavor to have a sincere and true friend, a friend who, without sparing us, without listening to the sentiments of a weak or in-

* Deuteronomy xxxii. 29.

terested friendship, will come to us, when we are in danger, and say to us with the same zeal and energy which the prophet manifested,—Prepare to die, and that immediately; for death is not far distant. Let us require of him, as the kindest office which he can do us, that he will not delay to explain himself, and that in explaining himself he will not be afraid of grieving us. Let us assure him that by that we shall judge whether he is sincerely attached to us; —that by that we shall distinguish him from false friends, and shall consider ourselves as under obligations to him for one of the most precious favors, which is a persuasion of the certainty of death when we are drawing near to that period. This is what we ought to wish from a friend. All other services, without this, or which do not go thus far, are vain,—are contemptible,—nay they are often times dangerous. But to attend to the salvation of a dying friend, —to be anxious for his soul and for his eternal state, —to endeavor to prepare him, by wise counsel, to finish, like a Christian, a life which will be followed by supreme happiness or supreme misery, this is to be a friend till death. Let us seek such a faithful friend. But where shall we find him? Not among men of the world. If they are at all friendly to each other, (and how very few are so?) it is according to the false spirit of the world; it is with regard to the frivolous interests of the world; it is to establish or advance a friend in the world. But we shall find him among the small number of virtuous and faithful servants of the Lord, whom he has reserved to himself, in the midst of a perverse world, and who are conspicuous for their piety. Such friends are the more valuable, as after having assisted us to live well they then help us to die well.

Thirdly, We should endeavor to fortify ourselves against the fear of death; because it is the immoderate fear of this event which renders the thought of

it so disagreeable, and the persuasion of its certainty so difficult. What people greatly fear they love to represent to themselves as being far distant; they even endeavor absolutely to lose the remembrance of it, as if it was never to arrive. Now with what shall we combat and overcome this fear? With the arms of faith, with the motives of Christian hope, with the holy ardors of divine love. For this purpose, we should often say to ourselves in secret, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." My soul arise and go forth to meet him. Behold he cometh. He will not come at a future time, but he is now coming; not to destroy thee, but to withdraw thee from the miseries of this mortal life, and cause thee to enter into possession of his kingdom. It is not to reject thee from his presence, but on the contrary, to take thee to his bosom, and to unite thee eternally to himself. "Behold the Bridegroom cometh." This language, it is true, is too elevated for worldly minded men; but it is a sentiment common to saints; a consoling view which encourages, fortifies, and animates them. With such a disposition they are pleased at beholding death as near; and the nearer they view it, the more are they prepared to meet it, the more do they redouble their cares, their activity, their fervor. To what will such a persuasion of the certainty of death lead? To a holy watchfulness against being surprised by death. This leads me to my second head of discourse.

II. Who would think, my hearers, that we could find a preservative against being surprised by death? Yet this important secret the Saviour of the world has taken care to teach us; and the secret is contained in this one word, *Watch*; a word with which the Son of God has connected many blessings; a word with which he almost universally concluded the divine instructions he gave to mankind; and a word a due attention to which is the substance, the abridgement of all Christian wisdom. For to what is the

wisdom of the gospel directed? To the great business of salvation. On what depends this essential, this only business? On death. And what more infallible and more necessary means to fortify us against death, and guard us against being surprised by it than watchfulness?

It is indeed true that, after all our watchfulness, the particular circumstances of death will ever be uncertain as to us until the event shall make us acquainted with them. But however uncertain death is, and always will be, as to the circumstances attending it, still we may so conduct that it shall never surprise us. After all our reflections upon the subject, and all our endeavors to penetrate into futurity, we shall still remain ignorant of the time, the place, and the manner of our death; because these are mysteries which our heavenly Father has reserved to himself, not only to his sovereign power, but also to his divine foreknowledge. "Which the Father hath put in his own power."*

But without knowing the time of our death, we may at all times be so attentive to ourselves, that there never will be an hour in which death will not find us on our guard; without knowing the place of our death, we may so expect it in all places that we shall never be in one in which we shall not be guarded against its snares; without knowing the kind of our death, that is to say, without knowing whether it will be a lingering or a sudden death, an easy death or one accompanied with violent agonies, a death which will leave us the full exercise of reason or deprive us of it, we may take such proper precautions that, as to the rest, it shall not be a death unprovided for. This is what constituted the difference between the wise and foolish virgins, who are spoken of in the gospel. The one were no better instructed than the other as to the moment when the bridegroom would

* Acts i. 7.

come; but in this uncertainty, the former had the precaution to keep their lamps always burning, whereas the latter slept, and during their sleep suffered their lamps to go out.

Herein, my hearers, we ought to adore the wisdom and goodness of God; that is, in this uncertainty of death, terrible as it is in other respects, on account of the salutary effect it is calculated to produce. For this is a mean which God has appointed to keep us from sin, and to induce us to watch incessantly over our actions, to measure all our steps, to weigh all our words, to purify all our thoughts, and to regulate all the desires of our hearts. If I knew when I shall die, where I shall die, and how I shall die, perhaps I should live in greater tranquillity, but I should live with a less sense of dependence; whereas the uncertainty attending the time, place, and manner of my death, reduces me to the happy necessity of carefully studying all my duties, and of applying myself regularly and constantly to the discharge of them. To live one moment without this preparation, that is, without this Christian watchfulness, is to act against all the principles and all the lights of reason; because it is to commit a whole eternity to the event of a moment.

Does it not then follow that the greater part of mankind, even of the most judicious and the most wise in the opinion of the world, are nevertheless blind and foolish? Ah! my brethren, this consequence is but too just; and does not the scripture tell us this in express terms? Has it not upon this point plainly condemned as folly the most refined wisdom of the world? How can we think otherwise, when we see men, such as, to the shame of Christianity, we see among all ranks, who pique themselves upon being watchful and ingenious with regard to every thing else, and yet neglect the only business in which they ought to be so;—men who are very attentive to the smallest interests of this life, and yet leave

to chance the important interests which death is to decide;—men who pass months and days in regulating accounts which they have with other men, and yet never attend to that great account which they have with God;—men who never think they have taken sufficient security, in their intercourse with their fellow men, and yet risk every thing relating to their salvation. Such however is the blindness of many nominal Christians; and God grant that it may not be yours. For, according to the expression of the Son of God, where is that faithful and wise servant who watches to be always in a preparation to receive his master whom he expects, and by whom he fears to be surprised?* Is it to be watchful to practise good works so little; to pay so little attention to the duties of Christianity; to commit sin so easily; to live in habitual transgression; scarce ever to think of repenting, and thus to be exposed to all the consequences of a sudden death,—of a death unprepared for?

Ah, my brethren, let us preserve ourselves from this unhappiness. Let us fear death; but let us so manage this fear that it may serve as a defence against death; and since the most solid advantage which we can derive from it is to be induced to watch without relaxation, let us watch at the same time, and in the same proportion, that we fear. Let us frequently call to mind those familiar, but convincing comparisons which St. Chrysostom employed, to make his hearers sensibly comprehend the truth which I am now preaching to you. Mariners, said that Father, do not wait to equip a vessel till she is at sea, beaten by waves and storms, and in imminent danger of shipwreck. Military men do not defer fortifying a place till the enemy has arrived and invested it. The servants of a prince do not begin to prepare for his reception when he is at the door, and

* Luke xii. 42.

on the point of entering. These are natural figures, by which we may better perceive the necessity of a prompt and assiduous watchfulness, than by any reasonings upon the subject.

No, no, says Pope Gregory; it will not be a proper time to prepare for judgment, when the premonitory signs of the coming of the Son of man shall appear, I do not say in the heavens nor on the earth, but in ourselves: when the sun shall be darkened; that is to say, when our reason shall be in that state of disorder and darkness into which the near view and the dread of death are accustomed to throw it: when the moon shall be eclipsed; that is to say, when our wills, characterised by the inconstancy of that planet, shall be weakened, and not in a condition to form any resolution: when the stars shall fall from the firmament; that is to say, when our senses shall be disturbed, and we shall have lost the use of them.

Let us remember the excellent remark of St. Austin, that to die the death of the righteous, it is not sufficient to think upon death when it is actually approaching, nor then to begin to prepare for it; but it is necessary to have thought of it and to be prepared for it before. Because Jesus Christ, all whose sayings are so many divine oracles, and who knew how to comprise in one word the most important directions relative to our salvation, has not said to us, "Prepare yourselves then," but "Be ye ready." From which this conclusion may be drawn, that there is a time when people may attempt to prepare themselves for death, and yet be cast off by God. Thus it happened to the foolish virgins, whose example I have already mentioned to you. They prepared themselves; they went to buy oil for their lamps, but too late. The bridegroom entered, and when they returned they found the door shut. How many are there whom God casts away at death, notwithstanding they had begun to prepare themselves; and whose preparation by a just judgment of God,

does not prevent their eternal damnation, because, instead of being complete and consummated, it was imperfect and but begun? They wake from their slumbers, they take the lamp of profession in their hand, but the oil of true charity fails them; they are in haste, they disquiet themselves, they agitate themselves; but the bridegroom still advances; death takes them away; the door of mercy is shut against them; and God declares to them that he knows them not.

Let us then be ready, my dear hearers, and always ready; and let our readiness consist not merely in those vague and fruitless designs of reformation with which so many satisfy themselves, and quiet their consciences; but in actions and deeds, in serious self-examination, in frequent confession of sin, in holy retirement, in useful reading, in charity, in prayer, and in all the exercises of Christian piety; for without these all else is but illusion. Let us not trust to the vigilance of others; and in a matter which concerns ourselves alone, let us rely only upon ourselves, to be watchful concerning it.

God has given pastors, says St. Paul, who are to watch over his people, as being in a sense responsible for their salvation. But after all, my hearers, you are your own chief pastors, and in many respects your only pastors; and all the vigilance of the ministers of the Church will not secure you from danger, if it is not accompanied and assisted by your own. If they neglect to watch over you and suffer you to perish, they must render an account to God for your being lost; but you will nevertheless be lost. The severe judgment which God will exercise upon them, for having neglected you, will not diminish that which he will exercise upon you for having neglected yourselves.

But what is that watchfulness which is so necessary? It may be reduced to three points, which comprehend, in substance, all the morality of the gospel, and which are the fundamental principles

of all our conduct with regard to death. First, Always to keep ourselves in a condition in which we should be willing to be found at death ; at least never to suffer ourselves to be in a situation in which we should be afraid to die ; and the reason of this is that we may die any instant, and in any place. Now, adopting this idea, and without going out of this assembly, were I to address myself to you, my dear hearers, and ask you are you ready ? What would your answer be ? But that question which I cannot here propose to each one of you in particular, you may individually put to yourselves. Should I be willing to die with my present sinful propensities, and carry to the tribunal of God the many sins which they have led me to commit, and which they daily cause me to commit ? Should I be willing to die in the exercise of a resentment which I still preserve in my heart, and which continues a discord offensive to God and even scandalous to the world ? Should I be willing to die without making satisfaction to my neighbor for such and such an act of injustice, for which my conscience reproaches me, and for which I cannot expect forgiveness from God, while I have it in my power to repair the injury, but do not in fact make reparation ? Are you willing, my brethren, are you willing thus to die ? But if you are not willing, it is necessary for you to come out of that condition, and that immediately. For there is not a moment in which you are not exposed to the stroke of death.

Secondly, Another thing, included in that watchfulness which is so necessary, is to do all our actions as in the view of death ; that is to say, to act in every respect as we shall wish to have done at death. For this purpose, we should undertake nothing,—execute nothing,—determine upon nothing,—regulate nothing relative to our worldly business, before, in our imagination, we place ourselves on our death bed, and consider well, as in the presence of God, what we shall then think of the business we are about to

engage in,—of the design we are about to form,—and of the means we are about to take to accomplish it; what we shall then approve, and what we shall then condemn; what will console us, and what will afflict us; how we shall then wish to have conducted in this business,—to have spoken in this conversation,—to have discharged this commission,—and to have acquitted ourselves in these duties of morality and religion. Possessed with these ideas, we shall esteem nothing,—we shall desire nothing,—we shall say nothing,—we shall do nothing, which will not be according to the law of God; and whatever we esteem,—whatever we desire,—whatever we say,—whatever we do, it will be in a manner becoming a Christian—with zeal and with fervency.

A third particular, included in necessary watchfulness, is that we frequently look into ourselves and examine our situation, that we may thoroughly know ourselves. Now what is this self-knowledge? It is to know all the duties which are binding upon us;—all the good which we ought to do, and which we do not do;—all the evil which we ought to avoid, and which we do not avoid;—to know to what we should pay particular regard in the condition in which we are placed;—the obstacles which lie in our way, or the particular advantages which we enjoy;—also the progress that we make in the great work of our salvation, and the deviations from it to which we are most liable. For this enquiry into ourselves, so great and so important, we should have set times each year, each month, and each week. We should meditate, deliberate, form resolutions, weep over the past, provide for the future, and incessantly renew our ardor. It is thus that a fear of death becomes our firmest support, because it serves to excite our watchfulness. Such was the fear of the saints of old, and the fruit which they derived from it. Not only did they reflect upon death all the days of their lives; not only did they watch, that they might be

to learn how to die ; and since we every moment die prepared for death ; but they learned to die daily, by making of life a continual apprenticeship to death. This is what I have to explain to you as the third head of discourse.

III. To make of life an apprenticeship to death, and by this apprenticeship in reality to learn how to die, and to form ourselves for that period, is not this not only a paradox, but even a contradiction ?—For every apprenticeship supposes two things, namely a frequent practice of the same kind of employment, and a power to begin a piece of work anew, and rectify mistakes made in a former attempt. Now neither the one nor the other of these circumstances is found in death ; because we die but once, and after death there is no return to rectify mistakes. Still, my hearers, it is a maxim of all the fathers of the Church that we may learn how to die ; and that this is the most important of all kinds of knowledge, next to the knowledge of God ; if indeed this can be distinguished from the knowledge of God. There is, say they, an apprenticeship to death ; and in this apprenticeship the saints of old were formed. All their care during life, was to study death ; and as it is natural for us to do that well with which we are acquainted, and which we have long practised, they died a holy death, because they well understood the knowledge of death.

Now it depends but upon ourselves to imitate them. There are three truths which regard us as well as them, and which we all ought to apply to ourselves. First, We in a sense die every day, according to the word of the Holy Spirit ; it is then easy for us to learn how to die : Secondly, All the creatures which surround us exhibit a lesson upon mortality ; our ignorance is then without excuse if we do not know how to die : Thirdly, That holy life to which God calls us, is, so to speak, a continual practice of death ; we are then very culpable in not being more versed and

more experienced in the art of death. Let us attend to an illustration of these truths.

1. There is a sense, my hearers, in which it is not true that we die but once. We die every hour; and every hour we may die voluntarily and freely, not only without sin, but it is our duty so to do. God having threatened Adam that he should immediately die if he disobeyed, the sentence, according to the remark of St. Ireneus, was executed upon him the moment that he violated the divine command. Otherwise, adds the same Saint, God would not have been sincere in the judgment which he had pronounced, nor have carried his threatening into effect. For he did not say to Adam, Thou shalt die at some future day: Thou shalt die at a certain time: Thou shalt die after having lived so many years and so many ages; but he said to him absolutely, Thou shalt die the very day and instant that thou shalt sin; and the sentence was executed this way. From that time Adam, in punishment for his disobedience, became subject to all sorts of infirmities; from that time he felt his constitution weakened; and his body, degraded, if I may so speak, from the privilege of innocence, began to decay and consequently to die. Now, what was verified in him is equally verified in us; and even Pagans have acknowledged this. We deceive ourselves, said Seneca, one of their wise men; and it is an error in us always to consider death as future. Instead of this being the case, a great part of death is already past with us; and we should consider that death holds under its domain the whole of our lives up to the present time. But St. Paul has said the same still more expressly, and the word of that Apostle is of the greatest authority. "I protest by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."*

Now, if we die every day, can we say it is difficult

* 1 Corinthians xv. 31.

necessarily, what hinders us from accustoming ourselves to die voluntarily, and from choice? Our eyes are as it were enchanted with the view of present objects; but if there is a charm upon our eyes, we ought to seek a remedy for it in our minds; and the remedy is fully to believe according to the remark of St. Austin, that this body which appears to us living, is in fact a decaying and dying body. These words are full of force and energy. You live; but the same principle which makes you live is that which makes you die; and although your senses may tell you the contrary, it is for your reason to correct them, by teaching you, that that period which seems to you to be life is but the beginning and the progress of death.

2. But again, who shall teach us how to die? And to what school shall we go to learn this important lesson? Who shall teach us, my hearers? All the creatures of the universe, and especially those by which we ourselves subsist and live. Indeed we need not go out of ourselves; it is within us that we may find all the proofs of certain death. We have only to interrogate ourselves; every thing within us will tell us, with a secret but united voice, that we must die; and whatever we may oppose to this in our own favor, we shall never have any answer but this, we must die. Thou art rich and in opulence; but thou must die. Thou hast credit and reputation; but thou must die. Thou art young and in a situation to taste the delights of life; but thou must die. Thou art the idol of the world; but thou must die. This is the only language which we shall ever hear; because God, in our creation, deeply engraved on our being this general answer, made to us by all the elements which compose our system, and which, by destroying each other, destroy us with them.

But if we look out of ourselves we shall find that all the creatures which surround us, and which serve for our sustenance and comfort, not only announce

death to us, but actually form and exercise us for death. By quitting us, by separating themselves from us, by ceasing to be with us, they teach us practically to die. To how many things may we not say that we are already dead, and that we die incessantly? The pleasures of youth are no longer suited to us nor we to them; the joy of yesterday to-day is not, and we are dead to it; the honors which were formerly conferred upon us are now no more, and oblivion, which is itself a kind of death, has annihilated them from the memory of man; and as those honors and those pleasures have already quitted us, every thing else, I do not say will quit us, but quits us as we enjoy it. Now is not that a very gross blindness of ours which prevents us after so much experience, and so many proofs of death, from learning how to die?

3. But the great and essential obligation lying upon us to cultivate a practical knowledge of death is the profession of Christianity to which God has called us; since, according to the rules of scripture, a Christian life, properly speaking, is nothing but a continual death. For this reason St. Paul, who perfectly well apprehended this truth, gave to the primitive Christians no other idea of what they were but this. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." And agian, "We are buried with him by baptism into death;" which passages are to be understood, says St. Chrysostom, not in a figurative but in the strictly literal sense of the words. For to what do all the maxims of Christianity tend but to detach the soul from the body, that is to say, to detach it from the sensual pleasures, from the servitude and slavery of the body? Now, to detach the soul from the body, what is this but to teach it to die? And this our religion imposes on us as a law, by enjoining upon us to mortify the body, and thus to die continually.

Let us then, my dear hearers, follow the leadings of the Spirit. Let us detach ourselves from that body which the scriptures so often call a body of sin; and let us not wait for death to spoil us of it by force, since it is in our power, and even our duty, to do this of ourselves. A soul which renounces the body at the instant of death only is a soul unworthy of God. You ask for a practical direction to teach you to die well. I will mention one, without which I dare to assert that all others are vain and chimerical. Detach your souls from every thing which you love, separate from God. This in a few words, is the science of dying. Prevent, by a voluntary mortification, the violent and grievous operations of death. Death will take from you the use of your senses; cause them to die in advance, by retrenching from them every thing which can displease God. Death will take from you your wealth; quit it now in mind and heart. Instead of indulging an insatiable thirst of amassing and accumulating treasures upon treasures, think it, in imitation of God, an honor to distribute them. Instead of desiring what you have not, give away, without regret and even with joy, what you possess.—Death will separate you from your friends; withdraw, therefore, your attachment from them in season, in a Christian like manner, and renounce all improper and dangerous connections. Reserve nothing; and remember that fine thought of the Abbe Rupert, that mortification, in order to do the office of death, and to have its qualities, ought to be absolute and universal. As people do not say that a man is dead, for his having lost his speech and his sight only, but in order for that he must be deprived of all action and of all feeling; so we cannot say that a Cristian is mortified, for having repressed some of his sensual appetites, if he has not repressed them all, and brought them all under subjection to God. When disgraces, afflictions, calamities, losses, happen to you, say to God, rising

superior to yourselves by faith, Blessed be thou, O Lord; this is but an anticipation of what must have happened at death. What thou takest from me, that would have spoiled me of; it is a tribute which I must have paid to death, and now I am happily quit of it. By that I should have been tied to the world; but thou hast broken my chains, and of thine infinite mercy thou hast so well ordered these things, that if I submit to thy will in these losses, death will have nothing frightful for me.

If, my dear hearers, you are in this frame of mind, give thanks to God for it; for this is to be prepared for death. And do not reply to me that such a life is a melancholy life. Let it be so; I acknowledge it; but this melancholy life will be followed with a death full of consolation,—with the death of the righteous. Now a holy death is a blessing which we cannot sufficiently prize, nor purchase too dear. I go further and assert that, taking all things into account, the death of a Christian, who is mortified to the world, and to every thing which could attach him to the world, is a thousand times more tranquil and consequently more happy, than that of those worldlings who are so much engaged for the world, and who so much fear to leave it. This one thought, nothing detains me, and I am ready to depart as soon as it shall please God to call me, affords the sweetest repose, the most solid happiness. But perhaps you will say, to live after this manner is not to live, or it is to live as one lived not. Ah, my hearers, is not this what the Apostle required of primitive Christians, and what is required of all. My brethren, possess this world as though you possessed it not; that is to say, live as though you lived not. Live without loving life or any of the blessings of life. Live to God, live for God, live in God, to the end that you may eternally live in glory with God. Amen.

Sermon VI.

ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

BY L. BOURDALOUE.

JOHN IX. 1.

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

THAT was a very surprising miracle which is spoken of in the tenth chapter of Exodus, when Moses, disposing, according to his wishes, or rather according to the command and will of God, of darkness and light, divided the land of Egypt in such a manner, that all that part which was inhabited by the Egyptians was enveloped in an obscure and profound night, so that the people could not distinguish each other; while the Israelites, inhabiting a part of the same country, enjoyed a pure and serene day. "And there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."*

But in the chapter containing our text, something still more remarkable is recorded. The Holy Ghost here exhibits to our view some men blinded by the same miracle which opens the eyes of one born blind.

* Exodus x. 22, 23.

The Saviour of the world, with that absolute power which he received from the Father, and which he exercised as God, cures a man who was blind from his birth; and this miracle produces, at the same time, two very opposite effects. It gives sight to one born blind, while it blinds the Pharisees. It enlightens the blind man, by enabling him to see more clearly, by the eyes of the mind than of the body, the author of his deliverance, and leading him to adore him, and render homage to him as God; and it blinds the Pharisees by furnishing them with an occasion to grow more obstinate in their unbelief, and more determinately to refuse to submit to evident truth. In these two effects consisted that adorable but terrible judgment, of which the Son of God speaks, and for which he came into the world. "For judgment I am come into this world; that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."*

That is, I came to cure the inward blindness of the humble and docile, who sincerely seek God; and, on the contrary, to increase, by withdrawing my grace, the blindness of the presumptuous and self conceited whom pride puts at a distance from God.

In the chapter before us, behold, my hearers, this judgment accomplished. The blind man here spoken of was a plain, ignorant man; and the Pharisees were the wisest and most enlightened among the Jews. The latter however remain in a criminal unbelief, while the former is filled with the purest light of truth. These enlightened and understanding men become more blind than ever; while the blind man is suddenly instructed and deeply taught in the most holy and divine truths of religion. By the righteous judgment of God, the same effects are now daily produced among us. But without speaking of the blessedness of those on whom God sheds the riches of his mercy, I shall, in this discourse, represent to you

* John ix. 39.

what there is terrible and alarming in the situation of those, on whom God pours out the severity of his justice. It is then of spiritual blindness that I propose now to discourse; of that inward blindness which penetrates the soul and holds it plunged in the grossest and most destructive errors; of that blindness of which Saint Austin spoke, addressing himself to God, "Wo to "those blind persons, who do not see thee, O my "God; and whose eyes, covered with a thick cloud, "do not discover thy divine truths."—I shall endeavor to explain to you the different kinds of this blindness.

There is no subject on which the scriptures explain themselves in terms more different, and even in appearance more contradictory, than upon spiritual blindness. Sometimes they impute it to the wickedness of man: "Their own wickedness hath blinded them."* Sometimes to the avenging justice of God: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and *shut their eyes*."† And sometimes to Satan, whom they call the God of this world: "In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not."‡ Sometimes they deplore this inward blindness as a misfortune, and at other times detest it as criminal. Sometimes they speak of it as an excuse for sinners: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."‖ And at other times as an occasion for reproach: "Wo unto you, ye blind guides."§ Now it is the diversity or apparent contradiction of these expressions which has occasioned so much perplexity on this subject, and rendered it so difficult to be explained.—To illustrate it, as far as possible, and to reconcile all those texts

* See the Apocryphal book of Wisdom, chap. ii. 21. The Romish divines frequently refer to the Apocrypha, which they acknowledge as partly canonical, though not of the same authority as the other scriptures. *Translator.*

† Isaiah vi. 10. ‡ 2 Corinthians iv. 4.

‖ Luke xxiii. 34. § Matt. xxiii. 16.

of scripture, I shall distinguish three sorts of blindness :—A blindness which is in itself sinful :—A blindness which is the cause of sin :—And a blindness which is the effect of sin. A sinful blindness is that which is pointed out to us in the above quoted words of Wisdom, "Their own wickedness hath blinded them." A blindness, the cause of sin is like that of St. Paul, who said of himself, "Who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."* A blindness, the effect of sin, is that of which Isaiah speaks, when he prays to God to blind the heart of his people. I shall enlarge upon these three ideas, which appear to me of great importance; and shall accordingly divide my discourse into three parts.

First, That blindness which is of itself sinful, is of all sins the most dangerous, and the most opposed to salvation.

Secondly, That blindness which is the cause of sin, though commonly made use of by sinners, as a pretext to justify themselves, is the most frivolous and least admissible of all their excuses.

Thirdly, That blindness which is the effect of sin, is the most terrible punishment which God can inflict upon the sinner in this life.

To these three important points give all your attention.

I. Whether we consult divine revelation, or judge by the principles of right reason, it is certain there is a blindness which of itself is sinful, because it is voluntary and even affected. That is to say, there is a blindness which many cherish within themselves, which they wish not to have removed, and which they secretly prefer to all the light of truth; a blindness which leads the sinner to fear seeing too much, and to avoid knowing either the evil that he does, or the

* 1 Timothy i. 13.

good that he omits to do, and which he is inwardly determined not to do. As if he should say, I wish not to be more enlightened than I am; I am ignorant of my duty; but I choose to be ignorant of it, or at least not to know its full extent; my blindness pleases me;—it is convenient for me; and far from being in pain in consequence of it, and wishing to correct it, I derive from it a great degree of tranquillity and peace, on which depend all the comfort and happiness of my life. Such is the nature of this sin. And are there to be found in the world people who have arrived to such a pitch of madness? Yes, my hearers, the world is full of them; and what still more shows the corruption of the world, is that they go this length without being considered as madmen. For if this sin was generally disapproved of among mankind, and considered as extreme folly, it would be more rare and less contagious. But, at the present day, it is very common, and in consequence of the number and quality of those who are guilty of it, is in some measure authorized by the perverted spirit of the world.

1. In the first place, this voluntary and affected blindness is the sin of libertines and pretended atheists. In themselves, and by the light of nature alone, men have means more than sufficient to know God; and they cannot efface him from their minds, or cease to believe in him, but because they will not yield subjection to his laws. By offending him, they come at length to forget and then to deny him. That was an excellent idea which Tertullian formerly expressed concerning Atheism, when, after having demonstrated, that as God is the first he is the best known of all beings, he concluded that the great error of infidels was not being willing to acknowledge him of whom they could never be absolutely ignorant:—Where you will remark that this great man, instead of adopting the vain subtleties of certain modern theol-

ogians, or reasoning like them, by making dangerous suppositions upon what regards the existence of God and a belief in his existence, admits of no ignorance concerning him which is not highly criminal. And this upon the express words of Saint Paul, who represents those as inexcusable whom a rash presumption so far blinds as to lead them to doubt the divine existence.—"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse."*

The fool balances between his reason and his heart: His reason teaches him that there is a God, but his rebellious heart tells him there is not. And because his heart has unhappily prevailed over his reason, he follows the dictates of the former, notwithstanding the discoveries of the latter, so far as to conclude, conformably to his desires, that there is no God in the universe. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."† Thus it is a voluntary and affected blindness which makes so many libertines and unbelievers among mankind.

2. This voluntary blindness is the sin of sensualists and voluptuaries, who, to enjoy their infamous pleasures with less trouble, wish not to hear the eternal truths of religion; and who have the boldness to say to God, as the holy Job, to express the misery or rather the sinfulness of their conduct, observes concerning them, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."‡ They say to God, 'Depart from us, O Lord, and forbear to infuse into 'our minds that knowledge, although divine, which 'discovers to us, in spite of ourselves, the ways of 'salvation. It is a troublesome knowledge; and 'while we continue determined, as we now are, to live

* Romans i. 20. † Psalm liii. 1. ‡ Job xxi. 14.

'according to the dictates of our passions, and to 'gratify our senses, it would but disquiet and alarm 'us. Reserve for others that illumination, which is 'the gift of thy grace; we are not yet disposed to re-'ceive it; to be guided by it would require too great 'a sacrifice; to be deprived of it is therefore better 'for our repose. It is true that the knowledge of thy 'commandments and of thy law is the knowledge of 'saints; but it requires things too painful, and too 'contrary to all our inclinations, for us even to wish 'that thou shouldst grant it to us. To renounce self, 'to crucify the flesh, to be obliged continually to ex-'ercise repentance, these things, if we were to think 'of them, would overwhelm us with distress; and 'the view that we should have of them would poison 'every agreeable and pleasant enjoyment which the 'world affords. We wish rather, O Lord, to spend 'our days in profound ignorance, and not to be in-'structed in what thou commandest, that we may be 'able, without remorse, to enjoy the pleasures which 'thou forbiddest.'

Thus worldly minded men, slaves to passion, and under the dominion of sensuality, express themselves, or at least thus they think.

3. This wilful blindness is the sin of certain conceited spirits, full of themselves, who, from the miserable influence of pride, cannot endure the truth from the moment they see it is calculated to humble them;—who, therefore, from that time, obstinately persist in shunning it, whereas, for that very reason, they ought even to seek it;—and who, as St. Austin says, love the truth when it is favorable to them, but hate and reject it when they fear its censure. This is the sin of those who, possessed with self-love, choose not to see their faults though gross, and who cannot bear to be reproved for them;—who take offence at the most friendly advice which is given them, and the most salutary remonstrances which are made

to them ;—who, far from receiving these as good offices, make them an occasion of resentment and ill will ;—and who consider themselves as obliged only to those who, from a false friendship or shameful complaisance, take care to conceal from them every thing which would wound them, and to dissemble with regard to every thing which would mortify them, however true it may be, and though very useful and necessary for them to know. This is the sin of those who wish to be applauded even for their follies and vices, and to be praised for their most irregular desires, their most violent passions, and their most criminal enterprises ;—who place all their happiness in being flattered and deceived ;—and who consider falsehood as a benefit, and adulation as a mark of respect. All this is a voluntary and affected blindness which makes them incorrigible.

4. In fine, this is the sin of a great number of nominal Christians, who, from another still more dangerous error, wish not to be enlightened with regard to certain facts, certain doubts, and certain scruples of conscience, because they well perceive, from a very slight examination of themselves, that they have not a disposition to discharge those duties to which a perfect knowledge of these things would show them they are obliged. These are those whom the prophet had in view in the 36th Psalm, and of whom he said, "They have left off to be wise and to do good." Verse 3.

The sinner wishes not to know what is good, because he is determined not do it. Thus, for instance, a man, obscure and unknown in the world, will intrigue himself into employments in which, without a miracle of grace, it is almost as impossible that he should be saved, as it is easy for him, to grow rich in a very few years. From an extreme indigence, or from a moderate condition in life, he is seen suddenly to rise to a degree of wealth which astonishes

the public.—One man, entrusted with the care of the property of others, in his management of it, has neither that exactness, nor perhaps that honesty, which is necessary not to confound his neighbor's concerns with his own. Another, in the functions of the magistracy, will often show himself in favor of his friends, at the expense of the weak and the poor. Another, being provided with Church benifices, enjoys them, and squanders their revenues, without having regard to the arduous duties which are attached to them. If either of these persons, after some time thus spent, were to enter into a close examination, and to weigh every thing in the balance of the sanctuary, it is evident he would find many accounts to render, many wrongs to repair, and many restitutions to make. Now all this would embarrass him, and reduce him to many disagreeable extremities. What then is to be done? To remove inquietude and scruples, a knowledge of the truth must be kept out of sight. People therefore thus circumstanced quiet themselves, by shaking off all thought with regard to their situation and conduct. Thus a wilful blindness hardens them, and renders them insensible.

I have already remarked, and I now again affirm, that of all the sins of which man is capable, no one is more dangerous, and more opposed to salvation than this. Why? Behold an unanswerable reason. Because this voluntary blindness excludes the first of all the means which God ordinarily makes use of, in the conversion of sinners, which is divine light; and the exclusion of this first grace puts us into a kind of impossibility of attaining any other. This sin closes the door of our hearts against God; and, if we may so speak, reduces him, all perfect as he is, to a kind of inability to save us, without an exertion of his almighty power, and the last effort of his mercy. Attend, and you will be convinced of this. I say, there is no sin more opposed to salvation. For, according to the principles of theology, the first step

towards salvation, is that light which discovers to us the ways of God, and shows us our duty. This light is absolutely necessary, since with regard to spiritual as well as natural objects, in order to act freely, knowledge is essential, and to obtain spiritual knowledge, it is necessary to be taught of God.—What do we do then, when we reject this light? We destroy in ourselves the foundation of salvation; and by opposing this grace, we renounce, as far as in us lies, all those other graces, which are in the treasures of God's mercy, and by which he would convert us and draw us to him.

For, to neglect this light, and much more, to fear and fly from it, is to say to God, that we do not wish the love of him to take possession of our hearts; that we do not desire him to impress us with a fear of his judgments;—that we do not wish him to give us confidence in him;—that we do not desire him to affect our hearts and make them penitent and contrite. Accordingly St. Austin says, "the fear of "God, the love of God, confidence in God, and ha-"tred of sin, are so many graces of the Spirit which "presuppose light and knowledge." From the moment then, that we renounce, by a voluntary blindness, the grace of knowledge, we render ourselves less susceptible of all the other gifts of God, and of all those gracious affections which could draw us to him. Now, can any thing be conceived of more directly opposed to salvation? Whilst we retain a knowledge of God and of our duty, however sinful we may be in other respects, God is still acting within us, and notwithstanding the corruption of our hearts and lives, we are still, in some measure, under the empire of his grace. Therefore our Saviour says, "Walk while ye have the light."*—But as soon as this light becomes extinct, all the operations of grace cease, and we may say of ourselves, that we cease to be in

* John xii. 35.

the way of salvation. I add further, this sin of voluntary blindness, takes from us not only light, but even all desire of light; it not only influences us to depart from the pathway of life, but renders it highly improbable that we shall ever return to that path; since it is certain, that the first step in the way of salvation is to seek, to study, to wish to know that way; to all which this sin is essentially opposed.

St. Chrysostom gives us a representation and a proof of this, in the example of the blind man of Jericho. Would this blind man ever have been relieved by the Son of God, if he had not ardently desired it? No: He cried, he urged, he importuned, he manifested an extreme desire to see: "Lord, that I may receive my sight."* It was in consequence of his eager desire that Jesus Christ restored sight to him. Those who have a wilful blindness do nothing like this; they have not even a faint desire that God should enlighten them. They are then at the greatest possible remove from the kingdom of God.

There is something still more frightful in this sin. Instead of having a sincere wish to be enlightened of God, such sinners desire directly the reverse; and instead of saying to God, "Lord that I may see;"—they secretly say to themselves, from an obstinate attachment to their sin, let me never see that which would constrain me, and serve only to trouble me. I no longer call this simply a sin; it is a madness like to that of the adder, which, according to the comparison of the Holy Spirit, stoppeth her ears that she may not hear. "Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."† With this difference, says St. Bernard, that when the adder shuts her ears, it is to preserve her life; whereas, when we shut our eyes against the truth it is for our ruin and our death.

* Luke xviii. 41.
† Psalm lviii. v.

I know, my hearers, that God, independently of us, can inspire our minds with divine light. Indeed, as this is wholly the effect of grace, it results, from its very nature, that it should be produced in us without our aid. I know that we are not left free to receive or not to receive this light; although we are free to make a good or a bad use of it, after it is communicated to us. But it is still true that when we hate, when we fly from the light, we place the greatest obstacle in the way of our salvation that a creature can place. This justifies me in saying, that this kind of blindness is of all sins the most opposed to the conversion and salvation of man. Into this sin we are all in danger of falling; especially those, who, governed by their passions, suffer themselves to be hurried away in a torrent of worldly gratifications. I would therefore persuade all who hear me to determine, from this time, daily to make that prayer to God which David so often made, and which so strongly marked the uprightness of his heart. "Open thou mine eyes." "Enlighten my darkness." "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." Let me no longer be deceived by the errors and false maxims of the world. I am blind, it is true; but, through thy mercy, O my God, I do not take pleasure in my blindness: on the contrary, I deplore and detest it. I walk in the obscurity of a languishing and imperfect faith; but I at least desire thy holy light; I ask it of thee; I am impatient to obtain it; I prefer it to all worldly wisdom; I will dispose myself to receive it. And since I know it is not in the noise and tumult of the world that thou sheddest it, and that, on the contrary, it there vanishes, I am determined henceforth to separate myself from the world; I am determined to regulate my employments and my conversation, and retrenching every thing superfluous, I will occupy myself with thee and with myself, to the end that, in the silence of a tranquil and retired life, I may hear thy voice, and profit by thy divine instructions. O my God,

change then and purify my heart. "Create in me a clean heart." And since it cannot be regulated but by spiritual knowledge, "renew a right spirit within me." Give me that knowledge which thy chosen ones possess. "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments." It is not to render myself more skilful in the affairs of the world, that I ask this of thee, O Lord; it is not to gain the esteem and the approbation of the world; it is not to distinguish and to elevate myself in the world;—I shall always be enough distinguished, O Lord, when I am regarded by thee;—I shall always be great enough when I fear thee. But give me this light that I may not be ignorant of my condition, or of any of my duties;—that I may know and do all thy will. I can dispense with all else, and I absolutely renounce every thing else if it does not conduct me to that: "That I may learn thy commandments." It is thus that you will preserve yourselves from the first kind of spiritual blindness, that which is in itself sinful. Let us now attend to the second kind, that which is the cause of sin.

II. I call that blindness the cause of sin, when a man sins only because he is blind;—when he would not sin if he had certain views of divine truth, which indeed he has not, but which he might and consequently ought to have. For it may with truth be said, that his blindness or ignorance is the cause of his sin, when, if his ignorance were to cease, his sin would also cease. Was there ever a more striking and, at the same time, a more terrible example of this than the crime of the Jews, committed on the person of the Saviour of the world? An incarnate God, delivered up to the cruelty of man,—mocked, insulted, condemned, crucified,—this was truly a sin, the bare idea of which excites horror; and yet it was a sin which proceeded from ignorance. The Pharisees had determined to destroy Jesus Christ; but they

did not know that he was the Messiah and the only Son of God. "And now, brethren," said St. Peter, preaching in their synagogue, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. Ye denied the holy one, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the prince of life;" but you have done this because you were in an error. Did not Christ himself testify the same, when, upon the cross, he said to his Father, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Still they committed the most abominable of all crimes. But whence proceeded this abominable crime? From that blindness which was brought on them by passion and hatred.

Nothing is more common than that ignorance which occasions men to fall into sin, or than those sins which are caused by the ignorance of man. How many dislikes, how many secret hatreds, and even avowed animosities are there, which have no other foundation than prejudice and error? Behold, says Tertullian, whence arise those violences which the Pagans exercise against us. That which carries them to these extremities is the hatred they have conceived for the Christian religion; and this hatred is founded in ignorance: For they hate Christians only because they do not know them; and from the moment they know them, they begin to love them.

Now, this same thing happens every day among nominal Christians. How many sins against charity, for instance; how many injurious and slanderous stories, how many calumnies, of which ignorance is the source? If people were well instructed in the truth of things, they would speak wisely, equitably, charitably; and doing justice to their neighbors, would by this means preserve peace. But, because they are prejudiced; because they do not take the trouble to distinguish the true from the false; because, upon a slight suspicion, or upon a false report, they believe that which is not true; in a word, be-

cause they are ignorant of the truth, they condemn the innocent, they wound the honor and destroy the reputation of their fellow men ;—they are piqued,—they are incensed,—they are enraged ;—and thence arise those evils which animosity and revenge so commonly produce. But leaving further details on this subject, which might be greatly extended, I proceed to consider a very important point.

It is asked whether that blindness which is the cause of sin will always serve to excuse and justify us, before God our sovereign judge ? If it were so, as St. Bernard says, would God, in his ancient law, have ordained sacrifices to expiate sins of ignorance in his people ? It is not true, then, that ignorance is always a just excuse for sin.

I go still further, and say that it is never so, as regards us. This may surprise you ; but I assert it without hesitation ; and I say boldly that in the age in which we live, ignorance is the least justifiable excuse that we can make. For in this age there is too much light for any to be justified on this ground. If I had not come, said the Son of God, and had not spoken to them, their unbelief would be excusable ; but now, since I have preached to them the kingdom of God, and since I have not concealed from them the great truths of religion, they have no longer an excuse for their sin. Let us apply to ourselves this reproach which Christ formerly cast upon the Jews. If we lived in barbarism, in an age wherein the word of God was as rare as, according to the scriptures, it was in the time of Samuel ;—if the truths of the gospel were hidden from us ;—if they were proposed to us only in enigmas and figures ;—if care had not been taken to represent them to us in all their force, we should perhaps have a right to depend upon our ignorance, and it might be of use to us before the tribunal of God. But in a Christian country, at a time when the word of God, that "bread of understanding," according to the expression of the Son of

Sirach,* is so amply and so often distributed ;—for any one to say, I have not sufficient knowledge, and I have sinned through ignorance, is to no purpose. Such an excuse is vain, and has no other effect than to render those who make it more criminal. This is a veil of wickedness with which St. Peter forbids us to cover ourselves ; it is to charge God with that which with confusion, we ought to impute to ourselves.

But some may say, notwithstanding this light we are still ignorant of many things essential to salvation. Ah, my dear hearers, I acknowledge this; and it is justly to be lamented that in so bright a day as that in which we live, there should still be so many things which we do not see ;—that in the midst of so much surrounding light our blindness should still continue. This is what surprises me, and what I must condemn. When the Pharisees declared that they knew not Jesus Christ, nor whence he was ; " As for this fellow, we know not whence he is,"† this, instead of silencing the man born blind, did but enkindle his zeal. " Why herein is a marvellous thing that ye know not whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." Intimating that after a miracle so visible as that they ought no longer to plead their ignorance as an excuse ; since the miracle which Christ had just wrought had openly and plainly refuted that plea.

I say the same of you and of myself. Yes, my brethren, it is truly astonishing that, without thinking of it, and without knowing it, we should every day sin through ignorance, when God has so abundantly provided for our instruction ;—when he explains himself to us in so many ways ; speaks to us through so many organs ; has appointed so many ministers to declare to us his will,—so many teachers to interpret his commands, so many guides to direct and

* Ecclesiasticus, xv. 3. † John ix. 29.

conduct us. "Herein is a marvellous thing." This is a prodigy, but a prodigy of iniquity, of which it would be shameful for any to pretend to avail himself against God.

It was an error of the wicked rich man in hell, to believe that his brethren who were still in life, and who lived as wickedly as he had done, could excuse themselves, upon the ground of their ignorance; unless Lazarus, or some other one from the dead, should be sent to speak to them from God, and to instruct them concerning their unhappy situation. No, no, says Abraham to him; it is not necessary that for this purpose Lazarus should leave the place of his repose. They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them; if they refuse to hear them, their ignorance will no longer justify them.

In this manner, my hearers, God treats us, when our ignorance causes us to fall into sin; and when our presumptuous and proud unbelief makes us wish to be instructed by extraordinary means. "They have Moses and the Prophets;" that is to say:—on the one hand, they have my law; and on the other they have Pastors and Teachers to give them a knowledge of it. If they do not obey, their ignorance is no longer an excuse for them. "Now they have no cloak for their sin."

Indeed, if after enjoying such means of knowledge, we sin through ignorance, we are not only culpable, but wholly inexcusable; because we act either against our own light, or against our doubts.

First, against our light. For in the midst of the darkness of our ignorance, we are not without a confused light which, if we would attend to it, is sufficient to enable us to see what is sinful; and which becomes useless to us only for want of reflection. Now, is it pardonable for us to reflect so little on the important business of our salvation? If the question was concerning some temporal matter, knowledge would not be wanting; we should readily find light

enough to answer our purpose. But with regard to salvation, we think we have no knowledge; with such a pretence, I say, God will not be satisfied.

Secondly, against our doubts. For if we have not sufficient knowledge to judge with certainty, concerning many things, we have enough to doubt. Now from the moment we have light enough to doubt, if we proceed further, we have enough to sin. For instance, I doubt whether a certain action is lawful; and yet engage in it: I am no less guilty than if I acted with full confidence that it was sin. I doubt whether certain property has been lawfully acquired by me; and yet, without examination, retain it and dispose of it as my own: It is as if I had taken it by some overt act of violence; because we are not permitted to act where our conscience is doubtful; and because a doubt, which I wish not to have removed, prevents my being upright, without which no ignorance can exculpate me.

Let us remember, my brethren, that the first of our duties is to obtain knowledge. Let us remember that one sin can never serve as an excuse for another; and that it is consequently in vain to wish to justify our omissions and our transgressions by our ignorance, which is of itself truly a sin. Let us remember that it is often more criminal in the sight of God, or at least as criminal to say, I have not known, as I have not done. It is upon this principle, my dear hearers, that we ought to examine ourselves. And it is not sufficient to apply it to ourselves personally; it must extend to all those whom God has entrusted to our care, and for whom he will demand of us an account. See the extent of this sin.

You have children to bring up; and you bring them up in a gross ignorance of the most essential points of salvation; you teach them every thing, except the knowledge and service of God; you give them masters to form them according to this world; and you do not pardon in them the least negligence. But

whether they are well instructed in their religion, whether they have the fear of God, whether they punctually discharge the common duties of Christianity; to this you pay little attention;—of this perhaps you never think.

You, mothers, have young daughters, who derived their birth from you, and to whom you owe an education. Let them sin, through ignorance, against the rules of fashionable politeness, you sharply reprove them; but let them sin against the laws of God, this you easily overlook.

You have servants. They live in a Christian land, and hardly know the first principles of Christianity. Does their ignorance excuse them? No: but it excuses you still less than them. For if they are obliged to gain instruction, you are obliged to provide means and opportunity, and it is in part for this, that God has made them dependent on you.

You ask me to whom you shall send them, to instruct them in religion? Do not be offended at my answer. To whom, you say, shall you send them? I reply, why should it be to any other than to yourselves; since God has committed them to your care? Do you believe it would dishonor you to discharge towards them the office of religious teachers? But again, to whom shall you have recourse, if you will not take the trouble yourselves? To many zealous ministers who will think themselves happy to be employed in such a service. Shall I say it? Send them to me. Yes to me, who shall esteem it a glory to instruct souls redeemed by the blood of Christ. Others will apply to you to be your teachers, and you will find instructors enough. But as for those poor people, as dear to God as the greatest among men, I will receive them. I will be their preacher as I now am yours. I will leave to you the privilege of commanding them, and will reserve to myself the charge, or rather the honor, of teaching them the commands of that sovereign Master, whom we all ought to obey;

and of explaining to them his law. Under the blessing of God, I will extricate them from that state of ignorance which, so far from being for you, and for them, a ground of justification, exposes you to fall into a third kind of blindness, which is the effect of sin. To discuss this was the last thing proposed.

III. It is an incontestible truth, that God sometimes blinds men; but whenever spiritual blindness proceeds from a divine decree, we are to believe that it is an effect of sin, and one of the punishments which God inflicts upon sinners. Thus the prophet Isaiah is to be understood, when speaking of the unbelieving Jews, he says, "God hath blinded their eyes." It is God who hath blinded them: That God who is the center of light;—that God in whom is no darkness at all;—that God who lighteth every man that cometh into the world;—it is he, nevertheless, who hath precipitated them into that blindness in which they are involved. And their blindness is such that, though they have eyes they see not; and though they have hearts they understand nothing, neither are they affected with any thing: "That they may not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts." Now it is evident that Isaiah, in explaining himself thus, considered their blindness as a just judgment of God, whose ways are a great deep;—as an effect of his wrath;—as the vengeance of heaven. It is then true, not only that God blinds sinners, but that he blinds them only in consequence and in hatred of their sins; it follows therefore, that, in such instances, spiritual blindness is the effect of sin.

In what manner a punishment so contrary, in appearance, to the holiness of God, is inflicted, or how he, who is light itself, can blind a reasonable and intelligent creature, is one of the unsearchable things of God, one of his hidden mysteries, in his decrees respecting mankind, which we ought to revere, but which it does not belong to us to penetrate. To un-

derstand these terms as being literally and strictly true, would lead to the belief that God, by a real and positive action, does himself produce this inward blindness; and we must acknowledge that on this point there are, in the sacred volume, very strong expressions, and which require great discernment and precision, not to be led into a mistake by them. For instance, when St. Paul says that God will send upon them that perish, that is, upon the reprobate, a strong delusion that they should believe a lie;* who would not thence conclude that he positively acts upon the wicked to inspire a lie into them; as he acts upon the righteous to enlighten them with the light of his grace? And when we read, in the first book of Kings, that God designedly raised up a devil to seduce Ahab, that he gave him an express commission for this purpose, and that at the same time he put a lying spirit into the mouth of those prophets, in whom that unfortunate monarch had the most confidence;† taking these passages literally, would not one say that God, by a special act of his Providence, is the immediate, efficient cause, which produces the blindness of the sinner?

But, my brethren, as St. Austin says, it is not so. God, eternal and essential truth, can never be the author of a lie;—all-perfect as he is, he can never deceive us, because he can never cease to be a faithful and true God. If he blinds us, it is by way of privation, not of action;—it is by withdrawing his light, and not by infusing error;—it is by leaving us to our own views and to the suggestions of the wicked, and not by himself giving us false views. For whatever terms the scriptures may use, the analogy of faith obliges us thus to interpret them. What does God do then, to blind us and to punish us? Nothing more than to withdraw from us and leave us to ourselves. That is to say, God, as a punishment for our unfaith-

* 2 Thessalonians ii. 11. † 1 Kings xxii. 23.

fulness and other sins, no longer affords us a certain degree and kind of light which he formerly gave us.

Now, I assert, and this is the last remark which I shall make, that this blindness, thus explained, is the most terrible effect of the vindictive justice of God; the most rigorous punishment which he can inflict upon sinners; that which approaches nearest to reprobation, and which indeed may be said to be reprobation anticipated. Therefore, as St. Chrysostom remarks, when Isaiah, burning with zeal for the interests of God, seemed to wish to persuade him to punish his people for their iniquities, he only said, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes."* For he knew that God had no more terrible vengeance in the store house of his justice than that blindness of heart. Do you ask why this surpasses all others? Behold, my hearers, the reason which perhaps you have never yet comprehended; and which is, nevertheless, one of the most striking truths of our religion. It is because the blindness into which God permits sinners to fall, in consequence of their sins, is wholly an evil without any mixture of good.

All the other evils of life are, it is true, punishments for sin; but still, if we please, they may become so many means of salvation. There are none of them which, if we improve them aright, will not be real mercies; because at the same time that God makes us bear the pain of them, by his justice, he renders them useful to us, by his mercy. They are evils, says St. Chrysostom, which purify by afflicting us,—which correct us,—which serve as trials,—which assist us to enter into ourselves,—which detach us from created objects, and lead us to God. But spiritual blindness is a sterile evil from which we can derive no profit.

* Isaiah vi. 10.

When God visits me with affliction, as sickness or worldly disappointment, I have something to console me. For in my distress I may say to him, blessed be thou, O Lord, thou chastisest me as a father; this sickness is designed, in the order of thy providence, to purify me, and to exercise my patience. Happy shall I be if I thus improve it! I abused my health, in leading a worldly and dissipated life; by depriving me of it, thou hast, in spite of myself, separated me from the world. I was indolent in thy service, and negligent of the duties of religion; but if I cannot now honor thee by acting, thou hast placed me in a situation to honor thee by suffering.—This is what sweetens my affliction. But should I be given up to judicial blindness, I could have no such consolation; for this kind of punishment is designed by God as vindictive punishment and nothing more.

It is in this respect, brethren, that the punishment of which I am speaking resembles that of the reprobate. For what constitutes the height of their misery? It is that the justice of God will never be satisfied by their sufferings; and the more they suffer, the more obstinate will they become in their wickedness. So also, spiritual blindness, instead of effacing our criminality, increases it;—instead of bringing our hearts to submission, it makes them more rebellious;—instead of appeasing God it increases his anger. It has all the pain of punishment, without having any of its salutary effects. It is, adds St. Chrysostom, like the punishment of the reprobate, eternal. All other evils, however great they may be, have an end; this has not. Death which puts an end to every other, instead of terminating this, gives to it, so to speak, a character of perpetuity. And as a saint, according to the expression of St. Paul,* passes, at death, from light to light, and from glory to

* 2 Corinthians iii. 18.

glory; that is, from the light of faith to the light of reason, and from the glory of saints to the glory of the blessed in heaven,—so a spiritually blinded sinner passes, at death, from darkness to darkness, and from blindness to blindness; from temporal blindness to eternal blindness, and from the darkness of sin to the darkness of hell.

Will any one then, says St. Austin, say that God does not, even in this life, chastise the wicked in a special manner? That he does not inflict upon them a punishment which distinguishes them from his chosen ones; and that in all respect, he confounds them, while in life, with the righteous?—No; God here judges impious transgressors, and makes a terrible distinction between them and his elect, by the different manner in which he chastises them. He does not wait till the end of the world, to separate the tares from the wheat, but even now inflicts upon the former a kind of punishment which with him serves as a mark of distinction, and that is blindness in sin. If we do not fear this, if we have not as much dread of it, as of hell itself, wretched are we! O Lord, exclaims the same father, how adorable and unsearchable art thou in thy judgments! And especially in that terrible decree which causes thee to send such a frightful darkness upon men to punish them for the sinful and irregular desires of their hearts!

If this avenging God has not yet exercised upon you, my brethren, this rigorous justice; if he has not yet permitted you to fall into this terrible condition, it is not because you have not deserved it; but because he has exercised greater mercy towards you than towards many others. Take care that this goodness does not at last become weary; and fear even the patience of God, which strikes the more severely the longer it withholds the stroke. Who of you knows that he has resolved to wait longer? Who of you knows but that, immediately after the next sin you commit, he will extinguish the light and blind

you? Who ought not to be seized with fear from the reflection, that there is a sin which God has marked as terminating the day of his grace?—that powerful grace without which no one can be saved! What is that sin? I know not. After what number of sins will it come? Of this I am ignorant. Of what nature,—of what kind is it? This also is a mystery to me. Is it some particular and extraordinary sin; or is it a common and ordinary transgression? This is a depth which I cannot fathom. All that I know, O my God, is that I ought to spare no pains to prevent the misery which threatens me. Happy am I that I see my danger! Not less happy that thou art yet disposed to aid me in escaping it! And supremely happy shall I be, if I walk henceforth, guided by thy divine light, till I arrive to that state of glory and blessedness to which thou art conducting thy chosen ones!—Amen.

A

SPIRITUAL PARAPHRASE

OF SOME OF THE

PSALMS;

IN THE FORM OF

DEVOUT MEDITATIONS AND PRAYERS.

BY J. B. MASSILLON.

A PARAPHRASE, &c.

PSALM I.

The happiness of a soul returning to God.

VERSE 1. Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

O MY God! In what a state of blindness have I hitherto lived?—I saw nothing, I judged of nothing, but by my passions; I mistook in every thing; and all my light was but darkness. Although I was not happy in sin, I incessantly sought in it a felicity which as incessantly fled from me. I thought I saw happiness in those who were not thwarted in their pursuit of pleasure; and I envied them a blessing which they did not enjoy themselves. But since thy light has scattered the thick cloud which passion had formed around my heart, I see my error, and wonder at my former delusion.

VERSE 2. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

I KNOW none happy here below, O Lord, but those who serve and obey thee. I sought a dangerous tranquillity from the conversation of the impious, who endeavored to fortify my mind against remorse for sin, by treating, as a puerile credulity, all the terrors of an hereafter, and by attempting to persuade me to

adopt those irreligious maxims which they could not really believe themselves. I wished to establish myself in the belief of that system which holds forth to the sinner neither an avenging God, nor punishments destined for those who violate thy holy law, nor an immortal soul to survive the body, and suffer eternal misery for its sins.

These poisonous maxims infected my soul, but, through thine inestimable mercy, they did not corrupt it to the total extinguishment of faith. I was pleased with those maxims, and was sorry that thy truth still combatted them in my heart. But, O my God, how happy do I now find myself to be turned from that course of impiety and blasphemy in which I sought a resource against my irregularities! I now perceive that to be happy upon earth, at least to be less unhappy, I must love, I must observe thy holy law. Every thing which removes us from thee makes us at variance with ourselves; and the more we seek happiness by offending thee, the more we increase our inquietude and our trouble, and consequently our unhappiness. For what joy, what satisfaction can a soul taste when it is deprived of that inward peace which is the fruit of piety and virtue?

VERSE 3. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

THE ungodly wither and perish in the midst of their pleasures; but the tears of the righteous man, those tears which the bitter remembrance of his past sins makes him shed, resemble those streams which increase the freshness, the verdure, the beauty of the tree which they water. Peace and joy are its first fruits. The burning and contagious air of the world, in the midst of which it lives, does not tarnish the beauty of even one of its leaves. On the contrary,

the bad examples of the wicked, their pleasures, their senseless joys, which had formerly seduced the pious man, confirm him, O God, in the fidelity which he has promised to thee. Affected by their blindness, he has a more lively sense of the greatness of thy goodness in spiritually enlightening him.

Every thing which before tended to his ruin, is now turned to his instruction and consolation. Nothing succeeded with him, while he lived in sin; events never corresponded to his plans and desires; every thing seemed to thwart his passions. But since thy grace, has calmed them, his desires are more regular; he forms no improper ones; his prosperity consists in resignation to thy dispensations; and as he is always submissive, no event disturbs his tranquillity.

VERSE 4. The ungodly *are* not so; but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

BUT the ungodly are far from enjoying a similar happiness. The passions, from which spring all their sinful pleasures, produce also continual agitations and troubles. With them nothing is fixed. The multiplicity of their desires, like a frightful whirlwind, agitates them incessantly. The chaff, which the wind driveth away, is but a faint image of their souls, always transported by the caprice and violence of their passions. They will not seek quietness in thee alone, O God; and where but in thee can they find it? Alas, all created objects to which they look for happiness, drive them back to thee, by their vanity and their insufficiency.

VERSE 5. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

THEREFORE, great God, it will not be necessary for thee to pass sentence upon the ungodly, in that

day when even the righteous shall be brought into judgment. The trouble, the grievous agitations of their consciences will judge them in this world. Thou wilt but deliver them up to the devouring worm, which their hearts, after having been incessantly tormented upon earth, will still carry with them into thy presence;—to that tormenting remorse which is so inseparable from sin that no pleasure could ever entirely free them from its anguish.

Verse 6. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Such is the termination of those projects of ambition, of pleasure, and of fortune, which fill up all the days of the ungodly. All are come to nought; nothing more remains of them. They wished all the world to be attentive to them; and their vanity will be punished by a universal oblivion. But thou, O most holy God, thou wilt not forget them; and, through eternity, a remembrance of their sins will arm thy justice against impenitent sinners who, though sent into this world but to love thee, to serve thee, and to fit themselves for the enjoyment of those ineffable blessings which thou reservest for the faithful, employ that life which they received from thee, only in offending thee and ruining themselves.

How different from this the portion of the righteous? Thou, O gracious God, keepest an exact and faithful account of all their ways, to the end that thou mayest recompence them. Not one of their actions is unheeded by thee. Thine eyes are incessantly upon them; and thou leadest them to perceive the effects of thy continual protection, sometimes by removing from them snares and temptations; sometimes by strengthening them in their combats with the enemies of their salvation; and sometimes by restoring them, when through the corruption of their natures they

have fallen into sin. In fine, thou wilt give them a crown of righteousness which will put them into possession of an eternal kingdom.

Happy, then, a thousand times happy are those to whom thou art all in all, since they have within them the source of a happiness which will never end!

PSALM III.

Meditations of a devout soul deeply affected with a sense of the enormity of past sin; and at the same time full of confidence in the mercy of God.

VERSE 1. LORD, how are they increased that trouble me? Many *are* they that rise up against me.

WHEN I review, as in thy presence, O Lord, the multiplied and heinous sins of my past life, trouble, discouragement, and despair seem by turns to take possession of my soul. I cannot call to mind one day, nor even one instant of my sinful life, in which I do not discover new transgressions rising up against me. Their number increases in proportion as I more narrowly search the depths of my conscience. And how know I, thou all-seeing God, but these are equalled or even surpassed by those which time has effaced from my memory, in a course of iniquity so long and so little interrupted?

VERSE 2. Many *there be* which say of my soul, *there is* no help for him in God.

I FORMERLY drank in iniquity like water. I added sin to sin without any remorse. The irregularity in

which I had before lived calmed my mind with regard to that in which I then lived. By always promising to myself a change in future, I continued tranquil, while sinning against thee, O my God; and not feeling myself as yet disposed to break off my sins, I augmented their number every day with a deplorable security. But now, since thy light has scattered my darkness,—now, since all my sins, issuing from the thick cloud which enveloped them, and concealed them from my eyes, appear openly and crush me in thy presence, by their enormity and their multitude, all hope of salvation seems to fly from me.

Canst thou, O divine Saviour, look with an eye of pity and clemency upon a life, the frightful sight of which I cannot myself sustain? Holy God, wilt thou ever communicate thyself unto a soul which desired to be able to fly from itself; and which can bring nothing before thee but its corruption and its shame? When I fix my attention on myself, every thing within me announces the severity of thy judgments.—What a life, great God, shall I find within the book of thy remembrance? The sun never rose upon my head but to give light to new transgressions of thy holy law; and the night succeeded only to prolong my works of darkness. I lived not, I breathed not, I thought not, but for sin. And now, every thing seems for ever to interdict all access to the throne of thy mercy, in consequence of the criminal abuse I have made of those serious thoughts which, from time to time, thou didst awaken in my heart.

VERSE 3. But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of my head.

THESE, O Lord, are the black and frightful images which the enemy of my salvation incessantly presents to my soul, to drive me to discouragement and despondency. Formerly he encouraged me in sin by representing to me thy mercy as always ready to

receive the returning sinner. But now, when I feel a desire to return to thee, he paints thee, in secret, to my troubled heart, as an inexorable God. He discovers to me the abomination of my sins, only to conceal from me the infinite treasures of thy mercy, and to keep me under his shameful bondage. He endeavors to persuade me that thou wilt not regard me,—that my heinous transgressions have for ever shut thy bowels of compassion against my cries and my tears.

But, Lord, if I have formerly abused thy goodness, by trusting too much to it, so as to persevere with greater tranquillity in iniquity, I will not add this new offence of despairing of it in my repentance. I feel myself, it is true, the weakest, the most frail of all creatures; but art not thou the strength of the weak? What have I to fear for myself, since thou wilt be with me, thou who art my shield and my strength? Nothing can equal the disgrace and the abasement into which my shameful passions have plunged me. Yet great as is the ignominy with which they might justly cover me before men, that which I bring into thy presence is still more hideous and humiliating. But, O God of majesty! one ray of thy glory will purify this soul of dirt and change it into the lustre of gold. Thou wilt establish me in honor whenever thou shalt ennoble me with the gifts of thy grace, and receive me into the number of thy children,—of those who are fellow heirs of an eternal kingdom. I shall enter upon all the august privileges of the Christian; my new and holy life will restore to me, even in the view of men, that honor and those regards of which my sins had deprived me; and thou wilt be my glory as iniquity had been my confusion and my shame.

VERSE 4. I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill.

YES, O Lord, my prayers and my cries will ascend to the feet of thy throne; and they will not ascend in vain. Thou art no more upon that terrible mountain, encompassed with lightnings and thunders, which no mortal can approach. I adore thee upon thy holy hill, where, O blessed Redeemer, thou offerest thyself to thy father for me, as my righteousness, my sanctification, and my redemption. Thine arms are incessantly extended to receive sinners who return to thee. It is not then thine infinite mercy which I ought to distrust; it is the sincerity and the perseverance of my repentance. I ought to fear that its greatness does not correspond to the enormity and the multitude of my sins.

VERSE 5. I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the LORD sustained me.

GRACIOUS God! what may I not promise myself from thy goodness; since thy powerful and merciful voice has awakened me from that sleep of sin in which I have so long been buried,—from that deadly supineness in which my irregularities kept all the powers of my soul? Thy voice has penetrated even to the bottom of the abyss, in which not only I lay without life, but in which noisomeness and infection offered to thy holy eyes nothing but an object most worthy of thy detestation. And yet, O Father of mercies, and God of all consolation, after having often solicited me to return to thee, thou hast at last re-animated this noisome carcase; thou hast breathed a spirit of life into this hideous flesh; thou hast re-established in me the beauty of thine image, the smallest traces of which I had effaced; and thou hast wrested my soul from the power of death and Satan, to put me under the protection of thy mercy.

VERSE 6. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about.

PENETRATED with this confidence, I will not discourage myself at the view of my unnumbered transgressions. I will call them to mind in the bitterness of my heart; but the recollection of them shall awaken my gratitude, my love, my compunction, rather than my fear and my despair. I will despise the derisions, the contemptible censures which my new life will draw upon me, from those who surround me, and who were formerly either the witnesses or the accomplices of my iniquities. Their senseless joys, the emptiness of which I have so many times experienced, their pleasures, their apparent happiness, which were always to me an inexhaustible fund of chagrin and cruel remorse, far from making me disrelish my sorrowful tears and repentance, will render them more sweet and amiable to me. The preference which I have given to thee, O my God, who art most worthy of it, will confound my lukewarmness, and animate my fidelity; and far removed from envying the lot of my former wicked associates, I will not cease to beg of thee, that they may at last be brought to experience the happiness of those who love and serve thee.

VERSE 7. Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

ARISE then, great God, and finish the work of my salvation, by not permitting those to perish, whom I may have drawn into sin by my solicitation or example. I shall not think myself restored to favor with thee, while I see the bitter fruits and terrible consequences of my sins remaining in them. Since thou hast been able to break the hardness of my heart, I am persuaded that every thing is possible to the power

of thy grace. Thou canst humble, when it shall please thee, those sinners who now appear so proud and bold in sin; and in whose happiness I cannot but feel interested, though my renewed life has stirred them up against me; and though they endeavor, but in vain, to shake my resolutions, and to draw me again into their sinful ways, by their satirical or alluring conversation.

VERSE 8. Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people.

THOU, Almighty God, canst save those, in whom every hope of salvation appears to be extinguished. Thou art pleased to work these wonders in the most hardened sinners, to the end that man may attribute nothing to himself, and that all the glory of his salvation may be given to thy grace. All the spiritual blessings which thou conferrest upon thy people, originate in the immense treasures of thy love; they are the unmerited gifts of thine infinite mercy.

PSALM IV.

Reflections of a pious soul when under trouble from the loss of worldly enjoyments.

VERSE 1. Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness; thou hast enlarged me *when I was* in distress;——

IN vain, O my God, have I daily protested to thee that I regarded the world and all its glory as a mass of dirt; and that thou alone couldst satisfy a soul which had the happiness of possessing thee. I knew not my own heart; I deceived myself. I was still held, by a thousand secret and insensible ties, to this deceitful world which I thought I despised. I still loved its possessions and its honors, which, like smoke, may be dissipated in an instant. But the deep distress into which the loss of worldly good things has thrown me has at last discovered to me those sinful dispositions, which I concealed from myself; but which thou hast for a long time seen in the bottom of my heart. A severe blow was necessary to awaken me from my dangerous, spiritual slumber. Thou, great God, hast struck this merciful blow; and now, fortified and enlightened by thy grace, I am more sensibly affected with shame for my error and my unfaithfulness, than with grief for my worldly misfortunes. Thou wouldst be my all, my only resource; therefore, as soon as I turned towards thee, in the bitterness of my heart, and called upon thee, thou didst not listen to the demands of justice, which required that as I had sought vain supports, foreign from thee, thou shouldst abandon me to myself; but, O thou God of goodness! thou didst come quickly to my relief; and a ray of joy and light immediately dissipated the dark melancholy of my heart, and enlarged me when I was in distress.

VERSE 1. ——————— Have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.

CEASE not, most merciful God, to communicate thyself unto me the creature of thy power, and to support my weakness. As for me, I will not cease to implore thine aid. Continue to behold me with the eyes of thy mercy, O Lord, who art not wont to measure thy favors by the merits but by the necessities of those who pray to thee. Have pity upon my misery; and make me feel still more sensibly, that the loss of every thing which this world affords is as nothing; that we have every thing when we are united to thee, and that we lose nothing really valuable so long as we possess thee.

VERSE 2. O ye sons of men, how long *will ye turn* my glory into shame? *how long* will ye love vanity, *and* seek after leasing?

O YE children of men! who run with so much eagerness in pursuit of a good which continually flies from you, and which, were you to obtain it, would but increase your desire for many things more, how long will you suffer your hearts to be seduced by an illusion from which your own experience ought to have freed you? How long will you love your inquietudes and your chains? The happiness you seek is but a heavy burden, which will oppress you as soon as you attain it. You find your cares increase in proportion as the world heaps its favors upon you; you find new desires succeed to those which have just been gratified. The world may think you happy; but jealousy and envy at the prosperity of others,—what is still wanting to gratify your ambition,—the vanity of every thing which you possess, and which, indeed, can never satisfy the boundless desires of a heart which God alone can fill,—that disgust and satiety which always follow the possession of

worldly good things, however eagerly they may have been desired,—the voice of conscience which incessantly reproaches you, both for the unjust means by which you attained the object of your desire, and for the criminal use which you make of it,—and even the thought that every thing here is uncertain, that the longest life is but a rapid instant, and that your souls will soon be required of you,—these things together become a secret worm which incessantly preys upon you, and poisons that show of felicity which deceives beholders; but which cannot so far deceive you as to make you really believe yourselves happy. Why, then, do you sacrifice your souls, your eternal salvation, your God, to objects, the false appearance, the vanity, and the nothingness of which you cannot avoid seeing? Be persuaded to love him who alone can give you every thing desirable, and to love whom is itself the greatest happiness which you can enjoy.

VERSE 3. But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call unto him.

I CAN appeal to myself, O ye children of men, in testimony of what I have said. Since, being in some measure recovered from the error of my ways, and the shameful indulgence of my passions, I have endeavored to conform my life to the holiness of the gospel, from a perfect conformity to which I am, however, still very far, the Lord has wrought in my soul wonders unknown to those who love the world supremely. I have experienced within myself a peace, a joy, a calmness which the world and all its pleasures never could have given me. Men of the world see the wonderful change produced in me, and endeavor to ridicule it; they seek in my weakness, and in the fickleness of my mind, the reasons of an event which originated only in light descended from on high, and in the power and grace of God.—

The father of mercies did not suffer me to wait long for this signal favor. No sooner had I turned towards him, no sooner, impressed with a sense of my sins, had I sent forth my cries and prayers to the feet of his throne, than he in mercy came to me. He has consoled my affliction, or rather he has caused me to find ineffable sweetness in the bitterness of my repentance and my grief.

VERSE 4. Stand in awe and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still.

O YE, who are slaves to the world and to your passions, imitate my example. Be indignant at yourselves for being so long seduced by vain illusions; look with horror upon the shame and indignity of your chains, of which you have formerly made a contemptible boast, but whose weight and infamy you now feel. Forsake the company of those who have seduced you by their persuasions or their base examples; and choose for your companions those whom you have hitherto hated, on account of the good examples which they set before you, or of the benevolent advice which they have given you. Change into a salutary hatred that excessive and ignominious love for the body and worldly objects, which you have hitherto indulged. You will cease to sin, as soon as you shall hate the source and instrument of your sins. But remember, it is not a disgust arising from satiety which constitutes this holy disposition. We may be weary of pleasures, without detesting them as sinful; we may perceive their emptiness, without perceiving their enormity and infamy. Examine your hearts. Satiety may give them a disrelish for sinful pleasures, without their being changed and inclined to holiness. But if the grace of God has produced in you a sincere change; if you are duly sensible of the dishonor done to God by your sinful passions, as well as of the disgrace which they are

calculated to bring upon yourselves, you will then set no bounds to your grief. The day will not be sufficiently long for the bitterness and the abundance of your lamentation; by this your sleep will be suspended during the silence of the night. This peaceful season which you have devoted to dissoluteness and riot, and the repose and darkness of which furnished you with so many opportunities to sin, will in future serve only to give leisure for the more free indulgence of your grief.

VERSE 5. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

BUT remember that God is not pleased with an imperfect sacrifice. Give to the Creator your whole hearts, which you have entirely prostituted to the creature. Spare no endeavors to serve him, as you have spared none to serve the world. Place upon the altar an entire victim. Have you been wholly the slaves of Satan for so long a time, and will you now give but the half of yourselves to the Lord, to whom you rightfully belong, and who claims you as his? You will never serve him with pleasure, until you obey him without any reserve. But as soon as you shall have rendered him master of your whole hearts, joy, hope, confidence, will spring up in the bottom of your souls. The remembrance of your sins will not offer itself to you but with the remembrance of that eternal mercy, which has inspired you with repentance and hatred of them: and the more the abyss into which you have been plunged, for so many years, shall appear frightful to you, and without hope of deliverance from it, if you had been left to yourselves, the more sensibly you will feel the merciful kindness of that God whose all-powerful hand has drawn you from the pit. In the history of your sinful wanderings you will read the history of his infinite mercy towards you; and the greater your sense of sin shall

be, the more long-suffering, merciful, and gracious will the Lord appear to you.

VERSE 6. *There be many that say, Who will show us any good?*——

BUT men, intoxicated by their passions, hear with disdain this useful advice. They insultingly say, Where then are that joy, that contentment, and that happiness, which are promised to those who return to the Lord? They would have displayed before their bodily eyes those invisible, spiritual blessings, which the eye hath not seen, the ear hath not heard, and the heart of man hath not conceived. They see nothing but what is gloomy and forbidding in thy service, O God, because they see nothing there to gratify their senses and to flatter their pride. The only felicity which they know and seek is a felicity which continually flies from them; a happiness which they desire incessantly, although they are never able to attain it, and the vain desire of which is the source of their most cruel chagrins and their most grievous troubles. They perceive every moment, in spite of themselves, that the world cannot make them happy; and yet they will not try the experiment, whether thou art not a sufficient source of happiness. They love a master who makes them miserable, but whose deceitful promises, though they have so often experienced their vanity and falsehood, lighten the actual burden of his yoke; while they have a slavish dread of him in whose service they would know no pain, nor sorrow, nor grief; and whose yoke constitutes all the consolation and happiness of those who take it upon them.

VERSES 6, 7. ——LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart,*——

WHILE such is the situation of men of the world, I indulge the hope, most merciful God, that thou hast enlightened my mind with a heavenly light to guide me to thee. I hear a still, small voice declaring to me continually, that thou art the only happiness of man; a voice which recalls me to thee in spite of myself; which makes itself heard in the midst of the tumult of passion; which follows me even when I go in the way of the wicked; and which never permits me to be wholly ignorant that, being made in thy image, I am made but for thee. Whatever, therefore, soils and dishonors this sacred image, and separates me from thee, for a season, becomes at once a source of unhappiness and of sin.

That divine light, which thy hand alone has placed in their hearts, is a continual source of joy and consolation to those who have the happiness of serving thee. They perceive that by returning to thee they are restored to the original dignity of human nature; that they conform to the purest lights of reason and conscience; and that they are then in the situation in which reasonable creatures ought to be. For in vain do corrupt men endeavor to persuade themselves that they are made for the enjoyment of sinful pleasure; and that inclinations born with them cannot be

* The meditations upon these verses may not appear to the reader to be such as would naturally arise from the words; and the same remark will apply to the meditations upon some other verses. The reason of this is that the translation of the scriptures made use of by the Author was what is called the Vulgate Bible, in which, in many places, particularly in the book of Psalms, the turn of the expression is a little different from the common English version, though the general sense is the same. The Hebrew language is not so definite in the tenses of verbs as more modern languages, and this occasions a little diversity in different translations of the Old Testament. *Translator*

criminal. This is the language of their passions; it is the brutal desire of their hearts; but it is not the profound sentiment, the inward persuasion of their consciences. They find within themselves a continual contradiction to this erroneous tenet. They may pretend to make a boast of it; but they dare not really encourage themselves with it. Their tongues may utter, but their consciences disavow the impious thought.

VERSE 7. ——— more than in the time *that* their corn and their wine increased.

THEREFORE, O God, the happiness which sinners seem to enjoy shall never give me a disrelish for the observance of thy holy law. It is but a vain show which conceals the most cruel remorse, and the most grievous inquietude. In thine anger, thou multipliest, in their hands, the possessions of the earth; thou loadest them with those perishable favors which are not worthy of thy servants, and punishest them by granting their sinful desires. But the kingdom of thy saints is not of this world; a more durable recompense awaits them.

VERSE 8. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.

PENETRATED with these holy truths, though I should be called to suffer many and sore afflictions, though the envy or the injustice of men should deprive me of every thing which I yet possess here below, provided that thou, O Lord, art still with me,—that my heart still possesses thee, thou only source of all good, the peace of my soul shall not be disturbed. Preserve in me that firm hope which thy grace has produced, and I shall be tranquil in the midst of all the transitory scenes and vicissitudes of life. I shall with joy see death arrive,—death which is but a sweet

sleep to the righteous; and my flesh shall rest in the grave in peace, waiting for a day of light and glory,—for that new and immortal life which thou hast promised to those who love thee upon earth.

PSALM VI.

Meditations of a sinner lately brought to a sense of his sins; lamenting them before God; imploring divine mercy, for the pardon of sin, and a deliverance from his deplorable situation; and finally obtaining a comfortable hope.

VERSE 1. O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

MOST great and glorious God! All the thunder of thy power would not suffice to punish me, a miserable sinner, covered with sin and pollution, according to my deserts. Thy severest chastisements would not be an adequate punishment for my sins, the recollection of which confounds and overwhelms me. Therefore, O most merciful God! do not consult what strict justice requires of thee towards me; and since thou canst not punish me according to the full measure of my sins, let fall from thy holy hands the sword which is ready to strike. Behold me with eyes of pity and mercy. Shut not thy paternal bowels against my prayers and my grief. The rigors of thy justice would be too little proportioned to my iniquities to be worthy of thy glory. It is only in pardoning me that all thy greatness and thy power can be displayed; and thy mercy towards me would manifest, more than thy chastisements, the adorable and incomprehensible nature of thine infinite majesty.

VERSES 2, 3. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed; but thou, O LORD, how long?

I CAN mention no motive for thy mercy, O Lord, but what is drawn from thine infinite mercy itself. I cannot plead my impotence, for this is itself my sin. How then can it become my excuse? The blessings which thou hast conferred upon me, and the talents which thou hast given me, ought to have excited my gratitude, and to have led me to praise thee; but instead of this, these favors, derived originally from thee, have been turned against thee. I have abused thy gifts, and prostituted to the creature what ought to have led me to thee.

At the remembrance of this, O most holy God, I feel myself penetrated with terror; trouble and discouragement seize upon my soul. The horror of my past life throws me into agitations of terror which vex my bones, and leave me without strength and without courage. My spirit sinks and is confounded. Struck with a profound sense of my misery, I remain immoveable, and can take no step to seek a remedy. But thou, O Lord, who seest all my impotence, and all the dangers of my condition, how long wilt thou leave me to my fears? How long wilt thou leave me in this condition?

VERSE 4. Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: Oh, save me for thy mercies' sake.

RETURN to me, O God of goodness! Let not the infection of my wounds any longer avert from me thy holy eyes. Look rather on the desires of my heart, which urge me to return to thee. It is thy grace which has created those desires; they are as a ray which precedes and announces the approach of full light. Let me no longer wait for this light, lest the darkness of my passions should soon take place

of that ray. Deliver my soul from those sad agitations which cause me to fluctuate between life and death; fix my wavering heart; finish in me the work of salvation which I would hope thou hast begun; render thyself master of a heart which thou alone canst purify from its sinful stains, and fit for communion with thee.

Such wonders, O thou divine Saviour! thou delightest to work. Great misery gives an opportunity for the exercise of great mercy. By restoring to life a Lazarus entombed, putrified, exhaling infection and noisomeness, thou didst manifest the immensity of thy grace, as well as the greatness of thy power.

VERSE 5. For in death *there is* no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

GREAT God, notwithstanding creatures can add nothing to thine essential glory, yet thou wilt that man should glorify thee. Not that his fidelity in thy service, and his submission to thy will, can augment thy happiness; but they fit him for communion with thee. Now, how can I render to thee that homage and glory which are thy due, whilst I remain in that state of sin and death in which I now find myself? In hell there is nothing but despair and blasphemy; and how can I adore thy holy name, and sing thy glorious praises, while in a condition so like to that of those miserable beings whom thou hast precipitated into eternal flames?

VERSE 6. I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

WHILE waiting, O God, for the happy moment of my deliverance, and hoping that thou wilt create in me a new heart, I will not cease to groan. I will water my bed with my tears, in the night season. I

will give no respite to my cries and my grief. Thou delightest, O father of mercies, in the importunities of thy creatures; I will not then fear wearying thy patience. My tears, my prayers, my silent grief, my fears, my hopes, shall be so many voices ascending incessantly to thy throne.

VERSE 7. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.

IN those moments when all the horror of my sins shall present itself to me, and when the thought of thy holy and just indignation shall throw me into the deepest trouble and despondency;—in those terrible moments when my eye cannot sustain the severity of thy judgments;—in those moments when the enemies of my salvation, who are attempting to increase my dejection and despondency, shall believe that they are about to prevail against me, and to persuade me to believe that there is no help for me, even then, great God, I will hope against hope; and the more terrible thou shalt appear to me as a just judge, the more I will confess that thy justice demands my eternal destruction, and that I have nothing to hope but from thine infinite mercy and grace.

VERSES 8, 9. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.

I ALREADY find, O God, that from this disposition I experience, in anticipation, confidence and peace. I find in myself more courage and more strength; I begin to perceive that we may indulge some hope, when we feel even faint desires for repentance; and that we affront thy glory no less when we despair of thy mercy, or even distrust it, while shedding tears of repentance, than when we presume upon it, while persevering in sin without remorse. It is thou, O

gracious God, who hast infused into my soul these consoling thoughts, in the midst of the troubles and terrors with which I was agitated.

It is done, O God! From this moment I will bid an eternal adieu to the world; I will break those ties by which my passions unite me to it; I will separate myself from all those objects, from all those connections, which daily threw new dangers in my way. I will henceforth have none for my friends but the friends of God; I will no longer be connected with the world by any ties but those of that charity which abideth for ever; I will love nothing but what I ought always to love.

VERSE 10. Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return *and* be ashamed suddenly.

ALL that remains for me to ask of thee, O my God, is that the accomplices of my sins, whom the change that has taken place in me will turn into so many censors and enemies, may be made to imitate me in my new life;—that they may be affected by the wonders which thy grace has wrought in me;—that my example may cover them with shame and confusion, and recall them to themselves, or rather, to thee, O Lord, who hast so many just claims upon them, and from whom man cannot depart without precipitating himself into an abyss of misery;—that having seen me who have been the most obstinate in sin, the most devoted to iniquity, thus changed, they may not despair of obtaining that mercy which I had less right to expect than they;—and that they may not think thy service hard and insupportable, since a sinner, sunk the deepest in sensuality, the most enslaved to the lusts of the flesh, as I have been, now finds in that service so much joy and so many new pleasures.

PSALM VII.

Meditations and prayers suitable for a pious person, when calumniated by enemies.

VERSE 1. O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust; save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me:

ALMIGHTY God! Delivered up to the calumny and baseness of my persecutors, covered with reproach before men, who are easily persuaded to believe any thing dishonorable of thy servants, to whom can I appeal but to thee, from whom nothing can be concealed, and who alone seest us as we really are? Thou only canst make manifest the malice and deceit of those who accuse me; thou only canst confound their wicked designs, and secure me from the poisoned arrows which they aim against me incessantly. It concerns thy glory, O God, not to suffer thy holy name to be blasphemed, and the cause of religion to be injured, by the reproaches which men of the world cast upon its public professors.

VERSE 2. Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending *it* in pieces, while *there is* none to deliver.

IF my interests alone were concerned, I would be silent; for thou, Lord, hast taught me to go courageously forward in the way of salvation, through evil report and good report. I would console myself with the consideration that I was thought worthy to participate in the reproaches cast upon thy Son, and upon thy saints. But it is thou thyself, it is religion which is attacked and insulted. Do not then permit my enemies to tear me, as a hungry lion teareth his prey; and do not suffer those who hate thee, and calumniate me, to believe, that the righteous hath no more share in thy favor and protection in this life than the wicked.

VERSE 3. O LORD my God, if I have done this; if there be iniquity in my hands;

It would be in vain for me to plead perfect innocence, and to attempt to justify myself before thee, O most holy God! In thy book of remembrance there are many transgressions charged against me, which I cannot deny, and which I ought continually to lament with penitential tears. But as for those sins of which my unjust persecutors accuse me, thou knowest that I am innocent of them, and that my hands have never been stained with the crimes which they lay to my charge. True my heart is sufficiently depraved to be capable of them, but thy grace has preserved me from them; and by boldly protesting my innocence, I do but proclaim thy mercy towards me.

VERSES 4, 5. If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me; (yea I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy:) Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take *it*; yea let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honor in the dust.

IF I have rendered to my calumniators injury for injury;—if I have pried into the most secret history of their lives, that I might publish their faults to their shame;—if I have sought to discredit their slander, by proclaiming to the world that their vices rendered what they say unworthy of belief;—if I have loaded them with invectives, to justify myself before men, and thus been guilty of hatred and revenge in thy sight, O thou God of justice! then I justly deserve to be given up of thee to their fury, and to fall a prey to their slander. I could not complain if lying and calumny were to prevail against me; I could not look up to thee for help, if I found myself oppressed, without support, and without resource, in the midst of numerous enemies, with their hands raised to complete my destruction. The humiliation which I

should then suffer would be a just punishment upon me, for the indulgence of such pride and angry resentment. O holy God, if thou ever seest in me those sinful dispositions, towards my persecutors and slanderers, let them redouble their hatred and fury against me;—let them add calumnies still more black and dishonorable to those with which they now load me;—let them tread me as dirt under their feet, and make me an outcast from thy people; and if there still remains any thing reputable in my character, which they have not yet dared to attack, let them ravish from me that honor,—let them reduce it to nothing,—let their envenomed breath dissipate it like dust; and for my portion, let me have nothing but that universal contempt and reproach with which they endeavor to cover me.

VERSE 6. Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies:———

BUT since, notwithstanding the malicious railings of my persecutors, my heart, through divine grace, has preserved that charity for them, which we ought ever to possess for those who injure us;—since my daily prayers for their conversion are the only recompense which I render to them,—arise, O Lord, and come to my help. Inflict upon them visible and salutary chastisements which may recall them to truth and righteousness. Manifest thy greatness and thy power to those who persuade themselves that strength or artifice governs every thing here below; and that nothing which passes upon earth interests thy providence and thine eternal wisdom. Make those enemies of thy glory feel that thou art the God of this world, as well as the God of eternity; that if thou sometimes sufferest the wicked to prevail against a righteous man, for a season, to prove his faith and increase his holiness, thou wilt sooner or later, rectify such seeming disorders; and that, after having made

use of the wicked, to chastise and punish thy servants, when thy designs shall be accomplished, thou wilt cast them from thee, and make them suffer humiliation and shame, as a punishment for their violence and pride.

VERSES 6, 7. ——— And awake for me *to* the judgment *that* thou hast commanded. So shall the congregation of the people compass thee about.———

HAST thou not commanded us, O Lord, to defend the innocent? Hast thou not established it as a law that we should not suffer strength and injustice to oppress weakness and innocence? I plead this command, and ask of thee the same succor for my innocence, with which thou commandest us to succor the innocence of our brethren. Let all the people see that thy servants have a protector in heaven, always ready to appear for them. Let them know that all the malice of men can effect nothing against those whom thou coverest under the shadow of thy wings; and that thou knowest how, when it is necessary, to make thy power manifest by protecting them. The people struck with these wonders, will come in crowds to surround thine altars; the number of thy worshippers will be augmented; and the faith of the righteous, and their confidence in thy promises will be increased.*

* The Translator has omitted the Meditations of the author upon the remainder of this Psalm, in order to give room for other Psalms, which, in his view, would afford more instruction to the reader.

PSALM VIII.

Adoration of the divine perfections, as manifested in the works of creation; and thanksgiving to God for his wonderful goodness to man.

VERSE 1. O LORD our Lord, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!———

MOST great and eternal God, sovereign master of the universe! What part of the earth can I go over, where I shall not find, all around me, evident marks of thy presence, and reasons for admiring the greatness and magnificence of thy holy name? If some savage people have suffered the idea of thee, which thou hadst engraved upon their souls, to be effaced, all the creatures which they have under their eyes bear it written in characters so indelible and so bright that they are inexcusable in not acknowledging thee. In vain does the proud infidel boast that he knows thee not, and that he does not find in himself any idea of thine infinite essence. It is because he looks for thee, O most holy God, in his depraved heart, and in his passions, rather than in his reason. But let him look around him, and he will find thee every where; all the earth will proclaim his God to him; he will see traces of thy greatness, of thy power, and of thy wisdom, enstamped upon all creatures; and his corrupt heart will be found the only thing in the universe which does not announce and acknowledge the author of its being.

VERSE 1. ——— Who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

MAN, having become wholly carnal, and minding earthly things, knows how to admire those beauties only which strike his senses. But, O most great and glorious God! if he would silence those debasing thoughts which obscure his reason,—if he knew how

to elevate his mind above himself and all sensible objects, he would immediately acknowledge that all that is great and magnificent in the universe is but a rough sketch and faint shadow of that greatness and glory which surround thee. The heavens themselves, whose height and magnificence seem to us so worthy of admiration, are as an atom in the view of thine immensity. Those stupendous globes, though so highly elevated above us, are infinitely more beneath the feet of thine adorable throne, than they are above the earth. Every thing manifests thy greatness, and yet nothing can trace out even a faint image of it. Raise then my soul, O God, above all visible things. Let me see thee, and love thee alone, in the midst of all the objects which thou hast created. Let them never, in my view, be exalted above their original destination and use. They were made only to display the perfections of him who created them, not to attract the love and homage of mankind.

VERSE 2. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

O THOU great supreme! Thou hast so visibly engraved thy holy name on all the works of thy hands, that there is no necessity either of sublime light or of proud science to lead to a knowledge of thine existence. The first impressions of reason and nature are sufficient for this; and were not these obscured or extinguished by the darkness of passion, or the false light of an abstruse and foolish philosophy, all men would recognize thee. Thou manifestest thyself to the humble only,—to those who are babes in their own estimation. It is they alone who know thee, and who render to thee the only homage worthy of thee, by loving thee, and publishing the praises of thy grace. But thou blindest proud sinners; thou deliverest up those enemies of thy name to the vani-

ty and wickedness of their thoughts. Thou sufferest them to fall from abyss to abyss, from darkness to darkness. And because they wish, by their proud researches, to elevate themselves to a knowledge not possessed by the rest of mankind, thou permittest their reason to be darkened, and their souls to lose even that light which is common to all men. Do not abandon me, O God, to that detestable pride which leads to a forgetfulness and finally to a rejection of thee; give me that humble and submissive disposition which wishes to know no more of the adorable secret things belonging to thee than what thou shalt see fit to reveal,—and which thinks it knows all that is necessary, when it knows that man is but ignorance and darkness.

VERSE 3. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

AND indeed, O Lord my God, what necessity is there of deep researches and laborious speculations, to know what thou art? I have but to raise mine eyes on high. I see the immensity of the heavens which are the work of thy hands,—those great bodies of light which roll so regularly and majestically over our heads, compared with which the earth is but an imperceptible atom. What magnificence, great God! Who said to the sun, spring from nothing, and preside over the day; and to the moon, appear, and be the torch of the night! Who gave being and name to that multitude of stars which, with so much splendor, decorate the firmament, and which are so many immense suns giving light to numerous worlds revolving around them. Who is the workman whose almighty power could produce these wonders, in which all the pride of dazzled reason is lost and confounded? Ah, What Being but thou, O sovereign creator of the universe, could have produced them? Did they

themselves spring from nothing by chance? And will the infidel be mad enough to attribute to that which is not, an almighty power which he dares to refuse to him who exists essentially, and by whom every thing was made?

VERSE 4. What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

FOR myself, deeply humbled at the view of so much glory and magnificence, I exclaim,—Is it possible that a God so great and so glorious will abase himself so low as to think of man, and make him the object of his care? That in thy sight, O holy God, I am but dust and ashes is nothing, compared with the wickedness of my heart, and the sinful stains which pollute me. Yet a rebellious worm of the dust, such as I am, attracts thy regards; and it has not appeared to thee unworthy of thy glory to remember me, and to visit me in thy great mercy.

VERSES 5——9. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all *things* under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea *and whatsoever* passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our LORD, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!

BUT I cease, O my God, to be surprised when I call to mind the state of glory and innocence in which thou didst create man. Thou didst impress upon him the glorious image of thy divinity. Thou didst breathe into his clay the spirit of life, an immortal soul, capable of knowing and loving thee. Thou didst adorn him with the gifts of knowledge, holiness, and righteousness. He only of all visible creatures had a right to raise himself to thee, to speak to

his maker, to give him thanks, and to maintain a familiar intercourse with him. The angels themselves, those pure and sublime intelligences, were but little superior to him; and thou didst give him dominion over thy creatures. Thou didst establish him the master and lord of all the works of thy hands; thou didst put under his command all the animals which walk or creep upon the earth, the birds which fly in the air, and the fish which make to themselves a path in the deep waters of the sea. With how much honor and glory, great God, didst thou invest man as he came from thy hands! Thou didst crown him at his creation, and place him at the head of all thine other works.

But alas! man did not long enjoy these blessings; he fell from the state of glory and happiness in which he was created; he made himself the slave of the creatures of which he had formerly been the master; and sin and death took place in him of holiness and life. But in this deplorable state of misery into which he had fallen, thy mercy, O most gracious God! prepared for him a remedy much more glorious than the blessings which he had forfeited. The eternal word descended from the bosom of thy glory, to unite with the nature of man. He took upon him the infirmities and sins of man, that he might make expiation for them. The human nature mounted with him to the right hand of thy glorious majesty, and saw itself raised above all principalities and heavenly powers. From thine adorable Son we receive the dignified title of his brethren, and he is as the first born among us. Thou wast our God; thou wouldst also be our Father. We were but thy workmanship; and we have become thy children. O thou great creator of the universe! It is not in producing from nothing all thy creatures, that thy power and the greatness of thy name appear the most admirable; it is in causing thine own Son, the brightness of thy glory, to descend upon earth, clothed with

the meanness and infirmities of our nature; it is in manifesting to us the great mystery of godliness, which thou preparedst before the foundation of the world, and which will be the consolation and astonishment of all future ages. "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

PSALM X.

Devout meditations and addresses to God, suitable for a person under affliction, when viewing the prosperity of the wicked, and the calamities which befall the righteous in this world.

VERSE 1. Why standest thou afar off, O LORD, *why* hidest thou *thyself* in times of trouble?

ALMIGHTY and eternal God! Thou hast taught us that the present is not a state of rewards and punishments; and that from the transitory blessings and evils of this life, we cannot judge of thine eternal counsels of justice and mercy towards the children of men. At times, thou seemest to stand afar off from thy servants here below; so that some are ready to think that thou regardest them not, and that thou art insensible to the afflictions and tribulations under which thou seest them labor. They seem in vain to call on thee for protection; that powerful succor which they look for in seasons when it appears the most necessary comes not; and thou leavest them in affliction, oppression, and darkness.

VERSE 2. The wicked *in his* pride doth persecute the poor; let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

THE sinner, surrounded with pride and prosperity, and enjoying, with insolence, property acquired by unjust means, looks with eyes of contempt upon the poor and humble condition of the righteous, and reproaches them for their fidelity to a master who, he impiously says, cannot give prosperity and happiness in this world to those who serve him, and who have chosen him for their portion. But, O thou God of justice! thou wilt one day confound the impiety and folly of such thoughts. Thou wilt surprise the wicked who are so intoxicated with their greatness and their riches, at the time when, arrived at the height of their wishes, they are applauding themselves for the success of their projects and their measures. In the twinkling of an eye, thou wilt overthrow that pompous edifice of pride and injustice which they have raised upon the tears and misery of thy people; and in which they think themselves securely sheltered against all the revolutions of fortune. The illusion will vanish, and surprised, when they least expect it, and when they are, perhaps, meditating new schemes to increase their immense riches, they will find that all their perishable wealth is but a heap of clay which crumbles to pieces,—a smoke which is dissipated,—a vain shadow which had seduced them, and which escapes from their grasp;—they will find that there is nothing real and durable for man but holiness and righteousness, those invisible blessings of thy grace.

VERSE 3. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, *whom* the LORD abhorreth.

IT is not astonishing, O God, that such unholy and dissolute men forget thee in prosperity. Every thing which surrounds them seduces them, and lulls them

to sleep by continual adulation. Their most iniquitous desires, their most criminal proceedings always find praises from vile and mercenary mouths. To their most shameful vices the respectable names of virtues are given. They think that every thing is lawful for them, because every thing in which they indulge themselves is applauded. O most holy God! Thou permittest it thus to be; thou punishest the corruption of their hearts, by the very applauses which justify it in their view, or conceal it from them. Thou sufferest them to deceive themselves, and quietly to enjoy their error. They love to be seduced; and the seductions of flattery are never wanting to those who love them, and who can purchase them by liberal rewards.

VERSE 4. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*:———

THUS, gread God, sinful man, in his elevation and prosperity, is so intoxicated with the praises which flattery incessantly prostitutes upon him,—he knows himself so little, or rather, is so full of himself, that he regards thee as if thou wast not. He thinks it nothing to affront thee daily by new outrages. Satiated with one sinful pleasure, he has recourse continually to new pleasures still more sinful. By being long accustomed to common sins, he has lost his relish for them, and therefore is continually seeking new ones, frightful for their singularity, to stimulate and gratify his pampered appetites and passions. He even gives himself credit for superior eminence and distinction in vice, as if common transgressions were not sufficiently offensive to thee. He applauds himself for having found out some secret methods of affronting thee,—methods unknown to the rest of the world. He endeavors to persuade himself, that the idea of thy heavy wrath is but a false terror raised to frighten the weak and the credulous. He boldly asserts

that thou art too highly exalted to abase thy greatness, by noticing what passes among men; that, instead of seeking hereafter to destroy the sinner, thou wilt forget him as though he had never been; and that, contented with enjoying thyself, thou hast prepared neither punishments for vice, nor rewards for virtue. Such impiety, O thou most high! affronts thy providence,—dishonors thy holiness and justice,—robs thee of every divine, adorable attribute,—and makes thee a God without power or justice. It therefore renders thee inexorable towards the impious transgressor, and draws down upon him thy most terrible judgments. Thou abandonest him to himself; thou permittest him to go on, undisturbed, in his own ways; thou sufferest him to drink in large draughts of the empoisoned waters of iniquity. But thou wilt soon make him feel that thou art more terrible in thy judgments, when thou thus permittest the wicked to go on, and takest no notice of their sins, than when thou restrainest them by temporal calamities.

VERSES 4, 5. ——— God *is* not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievious :———

O HOLY and righteous God! As soon as thy patience, having been pushed to the extremity, has delivered up the proud, unbelieving sinner to the corruption of his own heart, he publicly proclaims his rejection and contempt of thee; and speaks of thine infinite, adorable essence as a chimera which the error and credulity of man have formed. He lives and acts as if he depended on himself alone,—as if he derived from his own powers the means of his existence upon earth,—and as if there was not a supreme and eternal being, in whom we live, by whom we are, and who gives life and motion to all. And indeed, O God, it is very necessary that the impious transgressor should endeavor to persuade himself

that thou art not, in order to quiet himself in his sins, which he is very sensible cannot remain unpunished, if there is above us an avenger of sin and a rewarder of holiness. His conscience and reason rise in secret against this impious unbelief; he cannot wholly silence the voice of nature, which incessantly proclaims its author; but he regards this voice as the prejudice of childhood, and as the remains of a vain terror which education, rather than nature, first produced in his soul. It is necessary to shake off all the restraints of religion, when one wishes, without remorse, to throw off all the restraints of virtue and shame, and to enjoy, with tranquillity, the fruit of his iniquities. It is a disorderly, sinful life which first makes infidels. Religion cannot unite itself with such a life; its menaces poison all criminal pleasures. It is necessary, therefore, for the sinner to abandon those pleasures; or to endure continual remorse and fears, which trouble and distress him; or to renounce all religion. The choice is soon made; he determines to believe nothing, that he may live tranquil in sin. All his conduct then becomes truly detestable; he leaves traces of his pollution every where; he profanes the most sacred places and the most holy seasons,—seasons which ought to be devoted to the worship of God. Maturity of years does not lessen the depravity of his heart; old age hardens him in sin; in proportion as it renders him incapable of enjoying pleasures, it increases his desire of them; and in this last period of life, which ought to be a period of reflection and repentance, his wickedness and impenitence are increased to the highest possible pitch.

VERSE 5. ——— Thy judgments *are* far above out of his sight: *as for* all his enemies he puffeth at them.

O LORD, how can such a sinner, in this abyss of dissoluteness and darkness, have even a glimpse of

thy terrible and avenging justice, which is ready to break forth upon him? If thine infinite mercy sometimes causes a ray of grace and light to shine into his soul, he rejects it instantly; he increases his sinfulness, to free himself from it and extinguish it completely. The afflictions, the disappointments, which thy goodness might bring upon him, as a fatherly correction, would serve only to lead him to rebel against thee the more, and draw from him new blasphemies. As he had no disposition to acknowledge and bless thee under the receipt of favors from thee, so he will curse thee under thy chastising hand. Thy wisdom, therefore, discovering that from the depravity of his heart it would be of no avail to visit him with the rod of affliction, thou leavest him peaceably to enjoy his prosperity. His successes surpass even his desires. By his influence and credit in the world, he crushes his rivals and competitors. Every one who dares to oppose his elevation becomes the victim of his hatred and tyranny. He has the pleasure of ruling, and of seeing at his feet those who wished to rise upon his ruins. Thou seemest, O God, to smooth before him the road to favor and fortune; and if he meets with obstacles, they become to him so many means of hastening and insuring his success.

VERSE 6 He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for *I shall* never *be* in adversity.

IN the condition in which I now am, says this impious sinner to himself, What can ever shake my fortune? Thus, O holy and righteous God! thy justice is manifested, in the temporal favors which thou heapest upon the sinner. Intoxicated with his greatness and opulence; seeing these established upon solid foundations, suited, in his view, to continue for ages, he arrogantly presumes that nothing will henceforth be able to overthrow them. He considers the perpetuity of his fortune and the elevation of his

family as certain. He believes that his remote posterity will transmit his greatness, from generation to generation, even to the end. He is ignorant that riches, amassed by pride and injustice, bring upon families, in the issue, indigence and a curse; and that for any one to accumulate unjust wealth is to prepare great misery for his posterity. The abundance and pleasures which surround him conceal from him these sad truths. He says to himself incessantly, I will now take my ease; I will enjoy, in the midst of immense wealth, the fruits of my cares and labors, which have been sufficient to procure for me, at last, a happy and brilliant destiny here below. I have gone through many difficulties, and escaped many perils; but the time of fatigue and danger is past, and I have now nothing to fear. I may defy the whole world to overthrow the foundation which so many cares, and so many years, have thus solidly established; and nothing remains now but to drink deep of those pleasures which have been so dearly purchased, and to give myself up to them without reserve.

VERSE 7. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue *is* mischief and vanity.

From this time the conversation of the impious transgressor consists wholly of cursing, bitter raillery, deceit, and lying. He speaks but with a view of producing pain and causing mischief. Insolence and hardness are always the fruit of prosperity unjustly acquired. He who is raised by rapine and vexatious fraud forgets himself, in his elevation. Instead of blushing at the odious pomp which surrounds him, and of reproaching himself, in secret, for the meanness and injustice to which he owes it, he renders it still more odious by his haughtiness, and his proud disdain of other men whom he sees below him. He considers a virtuous mediocrity as an un-

happiness and a curse. He has nothing but bitter and sharp words for those whom his credit and fortune induce to apply to him for favors; or if he leads them to hope for any assistance, it is that he may, in the end, add deceit and lying to insolence, and completely overwhelm them with grief, by rendering their solicitations and pains useless. In vain do they plead his promises; their complaints procure nothing from him but injurious and abusive language. His mouth is open only to insult and reproach them; and he applauds himself for having abused them, as if it was a glory for him to be divested of every sentiment of humanity and good faith towards other men.

VERSES 8—10. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, *and* humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones.

But the wickedness of the proud and impious transgressor extends itself still further. If the inheritance of an innocent person would be convenient for him,—if the fortune of any one throws any obstacles in his own way,—or if he fears that, being acquainted with his iniquitous practices, any one will feel an obligation of conscience to discover them to the world, he courts the favor of the great and powerful, and endeavors to form connections with them, that he may ruin that person. For this purpose he secretly lavishes his treasures; for this he exerts himself to the utmost; and if at any time he appears to repose himself, and to be no longer active, it is only when his snares are so laid that the ruin of the innocent is certain, and that he cannot escape from his malignant artifices.

His eyes are fixed incessantly upon the poor, to find the most convenient time to oppress them. He is as a lion, concealed at the mouth of his den, watching impatiently for his prey. Loaded but never satisfied with riches, he looks on all sides to find men destitute of power and influence, whom he can ruin the more securely and with less fear of danger to himself. Wo to those who fall under his eyes? However moderate their wealth may be, they have enough to stir up this lion, thirsting for the blood of the poor. It is sufficient for him that they are without support and without defence. They fall, sooner or later, into the snares which he lays for them in secret, and become his prey.

When he thinks it would be dangerous for him to oppress any one openly and publicly, he has recourse to stratagem. There is no artifice of which he will not make use. The lowest, the most unworthy are employed, provided he thinks they will facilitate his wicked designs. Provided he can accomplish the ruin of the poor, and clothe himself in their spoils, fraud, perfidy, and perjury are counted as nothing. By smooth words, and by all the semblances of friendship, he draws into his net those whom he wishes to oppress. He leads them to believe that they will find in him a protector and an asylum. He lures them by many deceitful appearances. If it is necessary to make use of thy holy and terrible name, O glorious God, in order to procure credit to his promises, and to gain the confidence of those whom he is endeavoring to deceive, he makes no scruple of doing this. But when they have once trusted to him, and he holds them in his snares, he lays aside all these externals of mildness and humanity; and becomes a cruel and severe master. He falls upon them with a barbarity which nothing can mitigate; he endeavors to crush them into the dust; and nothing can satisfy his fury so long as they have any resource left for escaping from the destruction which he has planned for them.

VERSE 11. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it.

THE source of such daring iniquity is that the impious sinner persuades himself that God thinks neither of him nor of the righteous; and that he never deigns to cast his eyes upon any thing here below. So much impiety cannot exist in the heart of a man who acknowledges thee, O holy and eternal God! No one can really believe in thee, as the moral governor of the world, and indulge himself, with tranquillity, in such inhuman wickedness towards his fellow men. The bold transgressor, therefore, derives a frightful encouragement in his sins by endeavoring to persuade himself, either that thou art not, or that thou considerest as nothing whatever takes place upon earth. As his sins are effaced from his own memory, one after another, by means of adding to their number incessantly, he becomes foolish and impious enough to say to himself, that those transgressions which are no longer remembered by him, and which, with him, are as if they had never been, are no longer present before the eyes of thy justice. He thinks that the fate of the righteous and the wicked will be the same at last, and that he may improve the present life as suits him best, without fearing that the indulgence of his passions will hereafter expose him to evil.

VERSE 12. Arise, O LORD; O GOD, lift up thine hand; forget not the humble,

APPEAR then, O Lord! O God, come forth from the darkness which hides thee from the impious transgressor. Show to him an avenger whom he still fears, in secret, in spite of himself, though he pretends, in public, not to believe in him. It is not necessary for thee to display towards this worm of the dust all the power of thine arm; one single look

of thy just indignation will be sufficient to crush him. Do not suffer the poor and the unhappy any longer to be the victims of a monster, under the burden of whom the earth itself groans. Great crimes rarely escape thy justice in this world; and are there any greater, O Lord, than to rob the widow and fatherless, and to raise a wretched fortune upon the tears and ruin of the unhappy? Do not their groans and sufferings daily call for thine avenging justice; and will they not draw forth from thee the thunder of thy power, against the barbarous authors of their misery? For such great and heinous transgressions, exemplary punishment and severity seem to be necessary. Mankind are so depraved that a desire of amassing wealth would fill the earth with such tyrants, if some sudden ruin,—if an unexpected and total destruction of their fortune,—if a blow, struck by an invisible hand, were not sometimes to overwhelm them with consternation and terror; and thus teach mankind that there is above them a supreme being who rules over the affairs of this world.

VERSE 13. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require *it*.

THEN, great God, thy hand being laid heavy upon their sinful heads, their accomplices, seeing this and witnessing the great reverse which has so suddenly taken place in them, will no longer dare to flatter themselves that sin will always remain unpunished here below; and that thy justice is but an idle name made use of to intimidate the weak and the credulous. Thy long patience will no more give them occasion to affront thee; they will no longer believe themselves innocent because they are unpunished; they will at least fear the punishments of a God whose laws they despise; and if this fear does not lead them to virtue, it will at least lessen the enormity of their transgressions.

VERSE 14. Thou hast seen *it*; for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite *it* with thy hand:———

THEY will know at last that thou, O Lord, art attentive to every thing which passes in this world; and that nothing escapes the notice of that invisible eye which penetrates the most profound abyss. They will see, that instead of forgetting the righteous man, thine eyes are continually upon him;—that thou keepest an account of his pains and sufferings, marking the duration and the measure of them;—and that, when thou hast sufficiently proved him, thy vengeance will be displayed towards those who have wickedly destroyed and afflicted him. Thine oppressed servants are delivered into the hands of men only; but their proud oppressors shall fall at last into thy terrible hands, and be delivered up to punishments peculiarly severe, when destined to avenge innocence groaning under oppression.

VERSE 14. ———The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

AND what resource, O most merciful God! would remain for the faithful poor, when forsaken by all the world, if they did not find help in thee? Thou preparest sustenance for the meanest animals; and wilt thou leave, to continual indigence and oppression, rational creatures who serve and adore thee? Is it not in thee alone that the righteous, when afflicted and abandoned by men, can put their trust? Yes, O God of consolation! this is the portion of those whom thou hast especially reserved for thyself. They form a distinct, separate people upon earth, who belong to thee most nearly; of whom thou art the God and father, by a special and privileged title. Thy succor is their patrimony; it is an inheritance which thou hast promised to them, and on which they may rely. Happy sufferings, precious misfortunes, which make

thee our God!—which put thy sure protection in place of the uncertain favor of men; and which unite thee to afflicted saints by ties so pure, so consoling, so close!

VERSE 15. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil *man*: seek out his wickedness *till* thou find none.

ALMIGHTY God! Assured of thy continual aid, I will place no dependence upon any thing so weak and uncertain as an arm of flesh and blood. Sinners are not worthy of supporting and protecting those who serve thee. Their power, the offspring of iniquity and injustice, is destined only for oppression. Thou hast elevated them only that they may serve for the trial of the righteous, by the persecutions and troubles which they bring upon them. Thy servants would depart from the order of thy providence, if they were to seek from them a vain protection; they ought to expect nothing from them but opposition and abuse. But the time of trial will have an end. From the treasures of thy wrath will come forth a terrible blow, which will reduce to powder the power and greatness of the proud oppressor. His cruelty and injustice will be exposed to the world. Those riches will be taken from him which he had torn from the bosom of the poor. Nothing will remain to him but shame and reproach. His former friends will abandon him; and, to remove the reproach of having befriended him, they will be the first to publish, with marks of detestation, his violence and fraud. The crowd of flatterers which surrounded him will dissipate like an empty cloud. He will find himself alone, distressed with poverty, and burdened with the weight of his iniquities. In vain will people look for some remains of his former odious luxury and magnificence; the slightest trace of them will not appear; nothing will be to be seen but his confusion and despair. Such spectacles, O God,

thy justice exhibits frequently to the world. And will the impious sinner still flatter himself that thou wilt not seek out his transgressions?—that they will disappear from thine eyes?—and that no vestige will remain of them, any more than of things which have never been?

VERSE 16. The LORD *is* king for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.

IT is in vain, O holy and righteous God! that the sinner cherishes in his heart a hope of impunity. By public and striking examples of punishment, thou wilt manifest thy just and merciful government over mankind, to the end of the world. Thou hast not created men to leave them in the hands of chance; thou hast not given them up to the dominion of their passions, to tear and devour one another, without taking any notice of what regards them. Not a hair of their heads falls without thy knowledge. The impious of all ages have in vain wished to shake off thy yoke; thou hast made them feel that thou art the supreme governor of the universe, with whom is terrible majesty. But, O Lord, although thy sovereign dominion extends over all men, it is over the heart of the righteous, in an especial manner, that thou exercisest a peaceable and absolute authority. It is there especially that thou establishest thy reign, and displayest its glory and excellence. They alone will compose that chosen nation over which thou wilt eternally rule in mercy. While they are here they wander like travellers in a strange land; they sigh after that new heaven and new earth which thou preparest for them, and which is to be their eternal country. From that holy place, from that true land of promise, those shall be for ever excluded who here refuse to thee that homage of love, fidelity, and respect which are justly thy due.

VERSE 17. LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:

O THOU God of faithfulness! Thine afflicted servants look forward, with an eager desire, to the accomplishment of thy glorious promises. Though they may wish for an end to their troubles, they know very well that they are not to expect it upon earth; and that here there is no happy retreat for them, where there will be no more labor, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. They sigh after that perfect deliverance which is approaching, and of which their faith, hope, and love give them a delightful anticipation. Thou seest in their hearts, O God, a sincere desire for this; and that holy and secret disposition of their souls is as a continual prayer which thou hearest, and which is far more acceptable to thee than a vain multitude of words. For it is the heart only which can pray to thee aright; and thine ears are open to those cries and groanings only which the heart addresses to thee.

VERSE 18. To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

SOMETIMES however, O God of justice! thou avengest, in this world, the cause of the fatherless and the oppressed. In some instances, the wicked live long enough to see the ruin of their unjust prosperity; and poverty and shame succeed that abundance and worldly glory with which they were so puffed up. They labored only to elevate themselves and their families, and they have the grief to see that ruin and misery are their only portion. Their iniquities, concealed for a long time, but at length unveiled and exposed to the world, draw down upon their guilty heads, even in this life, evils which are but a prelude to those which thy justice has prepared for them in

eternity. Thy providence orders it thus, O God, to support the faith of the righteous, and to put some bounds to the pride of sinners; for if thine avenging justice was always deferred to a future world, the wicked, who are affected by present objects only, and upon whom the idea of a future state makes no impression, being assured of impunity in this life, would give themselves up to excesses, destructive of all the order of society. They would banish from the world all honesty, all shame, and all safety; and the only crimes, which they would not commit, would be those which they found themselves without power to commit. But when, O holy and righteous God! thou comest forth from thy secret places, and strikest those great blows which astonish the universe,—when thou bringest down those lofty heads which were raised to the clouds, as if to affront thee in thy holy abode, then thou causest it to be known, that thou art equally the God of the earth and heaven;—the God of the present and of the future world;—a being who makest the poor and the rich; who bringest low and who raisest up. The affrightened sinner, if he does not lay aside his disposition to do evil, forbears at least to carry it into effect; and fears that the thunder which still murmurs in the clouds will strike him next; while the righteous man is confirmed in his humble confidence in thine aid, his faith is strengthened, and he looks forward, with a calm submission, to the rewards which thou hast promised to the faithful, in the world to come.

PSALM XI.

Meditations of a saint, when persecuted by enemies, stirring up himself to forbear resentment, and to put his trust in the Lord; and seriously warning those who persecute and injure their fellow men, of the misery which will come upon them, if they do not repent.

VERSE 1. In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee *as* a bird to your mountain?

MOST merciful and gracious God! Permit me not to open mine ears to the pernicious advice which friends, possessing too little of a truly religious spirit, dare to give me. They wish me to take measures to revenge myself for the wrong done me by mine enemies; but how should I dare to present myself before thee, with hatred and vengeance in my heart, to implore thy mercy, to conjure thee not to enter into judgment with thy servant, and to beseech thee to forgive the immense debt which I have contracted to thy justice, by continual infractions of thy holy law? For thou hast expressly told us, that if we do not forgive our fellow men thou wilt not forgive us. No, my God, I wish for no other avenger than thee, for all the unjust treatment which I have received. And, in truth, it is thou only who hast a right to punish sinners, for their sins are, in reality, an affront to thee only; and thou alone canst punish without passion and without injustice. I ask of thee to avenge me of mine enemies, only from the hope that the punishment which thou shalt inflict upon them, may redound to the glory of thy name; that it may be the means of their conversion, and of producing in them that benevolent affection for me which I trust I feel for them. If thou canst be glorified by my sufferings, and by my humiliation, thy will be done; I accept with sincerity, the cup which

is presented to me, notwithstanding its bitterness. I hope that thou hast written my name in the book of life; and this hope makes me consider all things which happen to me, whether good or bad, as means which thy wisdom has prepared, and designed for my sanctification. For it is not men that we ought to regard in the blessings and evils of life; it is thou,—thou only, O God! that art the first cause and the disposer of all events, happy and unhappy. Men may wish to hurt us, or to do us good; but their good or ill will remains unfruitful and without power, any further than as it enters into the execution of thy designs of justice or mercy towards us. Under all the events of life, I will, therefore, lift mine eyes to thee. Instead of indulging anger against my fellow men, in consequence of the trouble and distress which they bring upon me,—instead of seeking to render to them evil for evil, I will pity them,—I will be touched with compassion for the far greater injury which they do to themselves; and, because I am guilty in thy sight, I will humble myself under the avenging hand of thy justice, which makes use of their hatred to chastise me. At the same time, thy chastisements, by making me fear thy justice, will fill me with confidence in thy mercy; for, like a tender father, thou chastisest thy children upon earth, only because thou lovest them, and because thou desirest to make them eternally happy in heaven.

VERSE 2. For, lo, the wicked bend *their* bow, they make ready their arrows upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.

WHAT have I not yet to fear, O Lord, from the malice of my persecutors? Their hatred is not to be satisfied; it furnishes them incessantly with new means to injure me. They seem to have made use of stratagem, violence, and calumny, to their full extent; yet I find them still aiming at me many new

shafts of persecution. And how can I escape them, O my God? I do not oppose stratagem to stratagem, nor violence to violence. Mildness, uprightness, and simplicity are the only arms with which I have hitherto defended myself, and with which I will defend myself hereafter. Thou knowest, O thou all-seeing God! that instead of ever having injured them in their property, their reputations, or their persons, I have always had a heart filled with tenderness towards them. I have eagerly seized all opportunities of doing them good; and have not ceased to beseech thee to shower down thy mercies upon them, and to enlighten them with regard to the deplorable injury they are doing to their own souls by their malevolence. Thou knowest, O thou who searchest the heart and triest the reins! that my supplications have always had in view my own deliverance less than their salvation; and I think I would joyfully consent to suffer still more, if my sufferings could blot out the sins of which they are guilty in thy sight. I do not boast of these dispositions, as if I derived them from myself. It is to thy grace that I am indebted for them; that alone has formed them in my soul. For what have I of myself, but weakness and an inclination to sin? Thy grace has given me a heart sensible to the wants and miseries of my fellow men,—a heart which does not permit me to turn away, without relief, those whom thy providence sends to me, if it is in my power to help them. Yet mine enemies, not content with returning the favors I have done to them, with black ingratitude, endeavor to destroy, as far as in them lies, the good which I have done to others, by ascribing to me corrupt views in the services which I have rendered to them.

VERSES 3, 4. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD's throne *is* in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

BUT under all the evils which my persecutors have brought upon me, and under a view of those with which I am still threatened, this is what comforts me, —this is what prevents my delivering myself up to impatience, anger, and revenge, that my protector is not a feeble man, whose good will is often of no avail for want of power; it is the all-powerful God, whose throne is in the heavens;—who sees under his feet the world and all that it contains;—who speaks, and, at his word alone, every thing is done, every thing is executed, so that his designs are never frustrated. And this powerful God is also a God supremely good, the father and comforter of all those who suffer unjustly. He does not so inhabit the heavens as to give himself no trouble to notice what happens upon earth; his penetrating eye sees and considers carefully, from the height of his throne, every thing which passes here; but his most tender regards fall upon the poor and the oppressed. Yes, gracious God, far from being indifferent to what concerns them, thou considerest as done to thyself the smallest good or evil which is done to the least of them; and as thou wilt not leave without recompense a cup of cold water, which shall be given to them in thy name, so thou wilt exact, before thy righteous tribunal, a strict account of those proud and insolent men, who, seeming to forget that they are men, all sprung from the same stock, all nourished by the same clay, dare to treat their fellow men as if they were of a different nature from themselves.

VERSES 5, 6. The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup.

YES, ye proud, unfeeling sinners! who have despoiled yourselves of every sentiment of humanity towards your fellow men, you must appear before the dread tribunal of the sovereign judge; and those whom you have persecuted and oppressed will appear there also. But they will be there to receive consolation, to have their tears wiped away, by the hand of their heavenly Father, and their patience crowned with a crown of glory and immortality; while you shall be there to see laid open, to the view of the universe, your iniquitous vexations, your violence, your injustice; and the overwhelming confusion with which you will there be covered will be followed with a terrible sentence, condemning you to eternal punishment.

Enter then into yourselves, all ye who love iniquity! If you believe in a future state, and in the blessings of eternity, how can you sacrifice them to the barbarous and inhuman pleasure which, from the wickedness of your hearts, you find in making the innocent suffer? What enemy can injure you so much as you injure yourselves? By nourishing in your hearts a cruel hatred of others, you amass over your heads a treasure of wrath, and kindle a fire which will torment you eternally. That malignant satisfaction which you take in doing evil will lead to bitterness in the end; and you will find yourselves suddenly overwhelmed with a deluge of evils which you little expect. The long patience of God, wearied at last by your excess in iniquity, will be changed into wrath; and you will find, but too late, what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. How greatly will things then change? Those whom

you have persecuted, having been proved in the furnace of affliction, as gold is tried in the fire, shall shine forth as the sun. Their afflictions, though distressing at the time, may in reality be called light, because what so soon passes away is as nothing; but their reward, their felicity will be great, and infinitely great, because it will be eternal. But as for you, oppressors of innocence, you will then be seized with trouble and with dread amazement, at the sight of your offended judge, who will pronounce upon you the frightful sentence of eternal misery. What will then be your astonishment, to see those men whom you thought deserving of all sorts of reproach and ill treatment, and whom you trod under foot as the dirt,—to see them enjoying a fulness of bliss, elevated to the rank of children of God, and partaking of the honors and felicities of his kingdom? Then, more tormented, in one sense, with the sight of their happiness, than with your own misery, what will be your sighs?—what will be the anguish of your hearts?—how will you deplore your sin and folly?

VERSE 7. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

AND is not this what you ought to expect for yourselves, and what you would expect, if the corruption of your hearts had not blinded you, and destroyed in you those ideas of justice which even the most savage people find in themselves, when they consult their reason? Do you not know that the God whom we worship is a just God, or rather that he is justice itself? But what would that justice be, how different from the idea which all men have always formed of it, if the oppressor and the oppressed were not to have a different destiny after this life? And is it not in this very thing that justice consists, in rendering to every one according to his works? Prevent then

such a season of rage and despair, whilst the arm, which is to crush you remains suspended over your heads, and whilst the goodness of the Lord incites you to repentance. Cease to do evil; repair the wrong which you have already done. If God counts as nothing that we do good to those only from whom we receive good, think how guilty those must be in his view who oppress the innocent, and render evil for the good which they receive from them. For myself, O God, in the expectation of that day in which thou wilt distribute rewards and punishments, with perfect equity, if my enemies do not become weary of persecuting me, I will not be weary of suffering their unjust persecution, I will not give up my heart to revenge, which would render me as guilty in thine eyes as my persecutors themselves.

PSALM XII.

Serious addresses to God of a saint lamenting the general corruption of the world, and praying for grace to enable him to resist temptation and persevere in holiness.

VERSE 1. Help, LORD: for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God! Why hast thou not placed me in some secure and holy retreat, remote from the dangers and general corruption of the world? I should then have had nothing to fear but from myself. But thou hast not designed for me, in thine eternal counsels, so desirable a situation. I am connected with the world by ties which thy holy hand has formed; but what a world! What a deluge of iniquity overwhelms the earth! Exposed as I am incessantly to the contagion of evil examples, my corrupt heart and passions inclining me to imitate them, can I promise myself that I shall not be at last led away by them, if thou dost not preserve me from this unhappiness, by a singular and continual protection? In vain, O Lord, do I look around me for examples of virtue, to support and animate me. I find nothing but allurements to sin,—nothing but a universal prevalence of iniquity. Thy saints, the faithful few who love and serve thee, conceal themselves; they live retired from the world; they banish themselves from public view, and are as if they were not. And how can they take pleasure in such a world? How can they forbear thus to withdraw themselves from it? Thy holy name is hardly known among men; the truths of thy word are rejected by the proud spirits of the age, and considered as acknowledged by the weak and credulous only; religion has degenerated into a mere decent form of

worship; the most holy and essential duties are viewed as singularities, of which most people would be ashamed; and, to avoid the ridicule of virtue, men of the world run into the greatest licentiousness. Come to my help, great God! and not only preserve my soul from this universal corruption, but give me a disposition to mourn for it at thy feet, and to implore thy mercy upon thy people who seem to have entirely forsaken thee.

VERSE 2. They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.

O HOLY and righteous God! For what purpose didst thou give to mankind the use of speech? It doubtless was that being united with each other, by this pleasing bond of society, they might lend their voice to all nature, to celebrate in common the praises and goodness of him who has so magnificently and profusely loaded them with his gifts. By furnishing them with this delightful and easy method of communicating to each other their thoughts and reflections, thou wouldst that they should be able to encourage one another in the difficult way of salvation, and be mutual helps under the troubles to which sin has subjected them. For what other end could thine eternal wisdom, which presided over all thy works, propose to itself? Yet, O glorious God, upon what does most of the conversation of the world turn? Alas! the most innocent is that in which people are occupied with vain and frivolous subjects only, and in which thou art entirely forgotten; for if it happens that thy holy name is introduced, it is almost always to to dishonor and affront thee by impiety and blasphemy. How illy is the conversation, which is generally carried on by men of the world, calculated to inspire a love of virtue? Alas! we hear nothing but pernicious and irreligious maxims. Vanity, am-

bition, revenge, luxury, pleasure, an insatiable desire of accumulating wealth,—these are the virtues which the world acknowledges and esteems,—these are the virtues to which it leads its votaries. But as for the virtues of the gospel, such as a disregard of worldly pleasure and honor, humility, mortification, contempt of riches,—virtues by which alone we can arrive at the kingdom of heaven,—these are either unknown or derided. Instead of regarding themselves as all forming together but one family, and, in a sense, having one common interest, it seems as if mankind were united in society only to deceive and defraud each other. Integrity passes for weakness. To be double minded and dissembling is the way to acquire honor. All connections are poisoned by the want of sincerity. The tongue is no longer the interpreter of the heart; it is only a mask which conceals and disguises the thoughts, and, with the externals of friendship and politeness, covers falsehood and deceit. Men strive to excel in lavishing praises and flatteries upon each other, while in their hearts they cherish hatred, jealousy, and contempt of those whom they praise. The most despicable worldly interest arms brother against brother, and friend against friend; and this motive, so unworthy of the end for which men are destined, determines their hatred and their love. The wants and distresses of their fellow men find nothing but indifference, or even hardness, in their hearts, when they can neglect them without losing any thing, or when they are to gain nothing by helping them. O most merciful God! How much do I need thy grace, and thy special protection, to preserve my heart in the midst of such universal corruption!

VERSES 3—5. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, *and* the tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips *are* our own: who *is* lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set *him* in safety *from him that* puffeth at him.

SUCH, O Lord, is the life of the world, and of a world which calls itself Christian,—which pretends to believe in a religion given by thee to man, one of whose fundamental and principal doctrines is, that there is a God who is the rewarder of virtue, and the punisher of vice. Who would not think then, that the righteous judgments with which thou so often threatenest men in the scriptures, and by the voice of thy ministers, would be sufficient to restrain that torrent of crimes which overflows continually? The punishments which thou preparest for the violators of thy holy law, one would think, would affrighten them; and though this fear alone is not sufficient to convert them, since it is thy grace only which can change the heart, we might at least expect it would suffice to repress the violence and transport of their passions, and prevent their giving themselves up to the most public and shameful excesses. But, O God, at this day, a belief in thy judgments seems to disturb no one; and the most alarming representation which thy ministers make of the terrors of thy law, often end in nothing but furnishing matter for impious raillery, instead of throwing terror and consternation into the conscience. It is in vain to tell people that their words and actions, and even the slightest desires of their hearts, are all written in thy book of remembrance, in indelible characters;—that in the day of the revelation of thy righteous judgment that book will be produced;—and that, the time of mercy being then past, every thing will be enquired into, and examined with rigor and inflexible severity. Some pretend to believe these frightful truths, and yet continue to live

as though they believed them not, and as though they were fully convinced they were not to render an account to thee. Others push their insolence and blasphemy so far as impiously to declare, that they know no master above themselves; they affect a proud independence; and instead of acknowledging that, as they did not derive from themselves their powers of body and mind, they are accountable to him from whom they received them, for the good or bad use they make of them, they pretend to believe they have a right to indulge themselves in every thing, as if they were dependent on no one. Thus, acknowledging no judge of their words and actions but themselves, and having no rule for their conduct but their own caprice, they live without any restraint; and the excesses into which they precipitate themselves cease to astonish, only because they are followed with those which are greater and more astonishing.

How deplorable is this blindness of man! How inconceivable is the tranquillity of those who, professing to believe in a heaven and a hell, pass their lives in sin, as if the future state did not concern them, or as if a life thus spent would not necessarily be followed with a miserable eternity! Behold, great God, what encourages them; behold the cause of this deplorable tranquillity! The evils with which thou threatenest them are evils to come; they are not present; it is rare that thou comest forth from thy secret places, in this life. Thy judgments are truly terrible, but it is not often that thou exercisest them here below; in this state of being, the lot of the wicked almost always appears, externally, to be more prosperous and happy than that of the righteous. Effectually to fear evils which will not be felt till after death, it is not sufficient to have a general, indistinct belief of them; we must believe them with a lively faith; but the faith of the greater part of mankind is only a dead, inoperative faith. Struck with sensible objects only, whatever they do not see makes no

impression upon them. To sacrifice the present which they see,—which they possess,—which they enjoy, to the fear of a future evil, which they do not see,—which they do not perceive, appears to them the height of folly. In vain is it represented to them that the present state, by which they bound all their felicity, is so short as not to deserve the attachment of any one ;—that the period of the longest life, compared with eternity, is less than an imperceptible point in an immense extent of space ;—that to that eternity, therefore, we ought to direct all our views, and adopt efficacious measures to secure happiness there. They assent to these truths, but their dead faith does not hinder them from rushing headlong, without fear and without hope, into that future state where their condition will be fixed for eternity.

O most gracious God ! Do not permit these alarming truths to find the same insensibility in my heart; and as thy judgments now fill me with fear, increase this salutary fear, rather than lessen it. Let the forbearance which thou manifestest in this life, towards those who offend thee, and which is the effect of thy great mercy, though it serves, most commonly, only to harden sinners,—let it not influence me to dread thy justice less than if a sudden punishment followed every infraction of thy law. Let that faith which has the power to render future things present, transport me before thy righteous tribunal, and enable me to realize the solemn day of judgment as already arrived. Let a fear of the account which thou wilt cause me to render to thee, overcome whatever repugnance I may at any time find in myself, to walk in the strait and narrow path which only can conduct me to thee. And if my frail, corrupt heart, seduced by the false appearances of pleasure and happiness which are incessantly displayed before my eyes, should be tempted to return back and engage again in the ensnaring ways of the world, let the idea of thy holy justice suppress in me all such rising

desires; so that, occupied incessantly with the strict account which thou wilt demand of me perhaps to-morrow, perhaps indeed to-day, of all that I have said, done, or thought, contrary or conformable to thy law, I may be continually prepared for the solemn scene; and that I may reckon among the number of the happy days of my life those only in which I shall have labored to obtain the favor of my supreme judge.

But, O God of mercy! is this the only effect which the expectation of a day of judgment ought to produce in me,—to fill me with terror? If that day will be a day of thy vengeance towards sinners, will it not be to the righteous a day of thy mercy and of thy triumph? If in that day, in which all the universe shall appear before thy tribunal, there to hear the decision of their eternal destiny, thou wilt be a terrible judge to the wicked,—if thou wilt have nothing for them but the thunder of thine indignation; wilt thou not also be to thine elect a tender and gracious father? Wilt thou not bestow upon them all the treasures,—all the riches of thy mercy? And ought not the hope of this to make me despise and detest the world, with all its vanities and false blessings,—fill me with an ardent desire to lead a holy life,—and make me support with joy all the troubles and difficulties which attend such a life? If I have the happiness to be of the number of those upon whom thou wilt bestow a crown of glory, shall I then regret the labor, the self-denial, and constraint it may cost me, to keep from wandering from that straight path which the footsteps of thine adorable Son have marked out for me? At the view of that blessed eternity,—that ocean of delight, into which I shall then be about to enter, shall I find, O my God, that thou hast made me buy too dear, or wait too long for the reward of my fidelity? Will my heart be sufficient for the transports of my gratitude to a God who consults his goodness and greatness only, in his

manner of recompencing the little that I do for him, in which I always mingle so much sin and imperfection? How will the language of those inconsiderate sinners then appear to me, who repeat incessantly that life is given us for enjoyment, and that to spend it in the exercises of piety and religion only is to lose it? Ah, if I could now think as I shall think at that moment, how vile and hateful would the world appear! How odious would every thing be which has the appearance of evil! What charms should I find in holiness! How easy, pleasant, and delightful would be the practice of its most painful duties!

O most merciful God! Deeply engrave, then, upon my soul these truths, so well calculated to console me in this vale of tears, and to animate me to persevere in duty. They ought not to affrighten any but those who abandon thee, O God of my heart, my all, the only source of all blessings! Let them be always present to my mind, to be a preservative against the censures of the world,—against the seduction of its examples, and the deceitful charms of its false blessings,—especially against the many erroneous and dangerous maxims which are so prevalent in this age of impiety.

VERSES 6, 7. The words of the LORD *are* pure words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

I AM well aware, O Lord, that the maxims and usages of the world are but error and corruption, since they are opposed to thy law,—that law so true, so pure, and so holy. Therefore, to take them for the rule of my conduct would evidently be to enter upon a course which cannot but terminate in destruction and death; for can error ever lead to true happiness? Truth, without any mixture of falsehood, is found only in thy holy law; for thou canst not teach

falsehood,—thou who art the God of truth, and truth itself. Let me then walk in the way which that points out to me, for the way of truth cannot fail to conduct me to thee who art the only source of happiness. Let me consult that in all my doubts; let me condemn what that condemns; let me approve what that approves; let me love what that requires me to love. It is in this way that thou wilt save me, O my God; and enabling me to avoid the rocks to which thy servants are so much exposed, in the boisterous ocean of life, in consequence of the storms and tempests which the world raises against them, thou wilt cause me at last to arrive at a haven of safety and felicity.

VERSE 8. The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

YES, O Lord, I have need to keep myself invariably attached to the truth of thy holy law, and to consult that incessantly. The efforts which the world makes to seduce me are continual; the means which it uses in order to succeed are infinite; at every step which I take I find this alluring world intent upon my ruin; and still I am not able to separate myself from it wholly. If the wicked constituted a people apart, and distinct from the righteous, I should then have only to avoid their society, to secure myself from their seduction: If their number was inconsiderable, the influence which the contrary example of the greater number of righteous would have upon me, would render their allurements less dangerous: If at least they were distinguished from thy servants by some visible and unequivocal mark, I could then take heed and provide against their artifices, though obliged to live among them. But alas! the wicked live in the midst of the righteous and connected with them; they are their relations and their friends. The number of them is so great that the good, compared with them, are

like the grapes scattered here and there, which have escaped the attention and avidity of the vintager. Many cover their vices under the appearance of so many virtues, that it is often impossible to know what they really are, and thus guard against them. Such persons, O God, are the most dangerous to thy servants; those who are open and bold in vice and irreligion are less to be feared. How difficult is it to defend ourselves against those who appear to agree with us as respects essential duties, and who publicly condemn every thing grossly and openly wicked? They pretend they would be very sorry to lead us to violate thy commandments, and that they are not less anxious for salvation than we are. They claim to understand the spirit of thy law better than we do; they say that we are too much alarmed concerning thy justice, and that we do not place sufficient reliance on thine infinite mercy. They do not attack religion directly, because they well know they would be repulsed. They therefore content themselves, at first, with attempting to weaken it, sometimes by retrenching from its ordinary duties, and sometimes by artfully suggesting doubts with respect to rules of conduct and maxims which till then had been thought incontestible. They say that all men must be condemned, if the austere way which has been hitherto marked out is the only way to heaven; and thus they operate so powerfully as to destroy in many, who have professed themselves thy servants, all real piety, and leave only the appearance of goodness.

In the midst of so many snares, laid with so much art, my salvation, O my God, must be wholly the work of thy grace; and my ruin is inevitable if thou abandonest me one moment to myself.

PSALM XIV.

Meditations of a saint upon the great prevalence of infidelity and irreligion in the world.

VERSE 1. The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. ———

INFIDELITY always begins in the heart. As soon as man gives himself up to the most shameful passions, and pushes them to the most enormous excesses, he seeks to justify them to himself by saying, in secret, that thou art not,—thou, eternal God! by whom every thing exists. It is not in his reason that his doubts concerning thine adorable essence originate; thou there causest a ray of light to shine which shows thee to him every where, which makes him always carry within him a strong, and incontestible witness of thy being:—It is in his depraved heart that these doubts are formed. He wishes thee not to be; he endeavors to persuade himself that thou art not; he even glories in appearing to be convinced, and, with disdain, insults those who are frightened at his blasphemies, as being weak and credulous. But he is an impostor; his mouth and his heart only renounce thee, and proclaim that thou art nothing; while his reason acknowledges thee, and, in spite of himself, does homage to thee. Can it be, O God, that man is capable of falling into this abyss of extravagance? He would annihilate the idea of thine existence in the minds of other men, but cannot efface it wholly from his own mind; he preaches atheism to others, but cannot succeed in becoming wholly an atheist himself. He cannot long support this contrast in which extravagance and impiety equally display themselves. He is afraid to revolt against all mankind, and to find himself the only person in the universe who wishes and acknowledges no God; he

is therefore compelled to speak the language of other men, so far as to confess that thou art; but though he leaves to thee thine existence, he takes from it every thing which could render thee supremely wise, just, and adorable. He makes to himself a God according to his own ideas. He denies to thee the glory of having produced the world from nothing, and the care of governing it. He leaves thee upon the throne of thy majesty as an inactive idol, taking no part in what passes in the universe, and abandoning to chance, and the fortuitous concurrence of second causes, the destiny of man. He persuades himself that thou hast never spoken to mankind, either by thyself or by thy prophets; nor, in these last times, by the mouth of thy Son. He regards all religions as equally the effect of the prejudices and superstition of the vulgar. The history of the wonders wrought by thee in favor of thine ancient people, to preserve among them the knowledge of thy name, appears to him but a fabulous account, invented to flatter the vanity, and amuse the credulity of a barbarous and superstitious nation.—And even the establishment of thy gospel, the prodigies which were displayed to the view of the universe, the labors of so many apostolic men, and the sufferings of so many martyrs, who purged a great part of the world from idolatry, and every where spread the knowledge of thy holy and wise doctrines,—these marvellous events, in which thy power was manifested in so visible a manner, were, in his view, nothing but the foolish contrivance of a small number of credulous men or impostors.

And yet these credulous men or impostors were able to put to silence the most wise and the most enlightened among men;—to change the face of the world;—to render a testimony, by the most frightful torments and by their death, to truth, and to the God who had sent them;—to reclaim men from vices in which they had long indulged themselves, and which were authorized by public opinion;—and to establish

a system of doctrines the most wise, the most holy, the most sublime, the most conformed to the necessities of men, the most opposed to their passions, and, in a word, the most worthy of the supreme being, that was ever heard upon earth. Such, O God, is the boasted wisdom, or rather the contemptible madness, of those whom the world calls wise,—of the freethinkers of the age, whose number increases more and more among thy people.

VERSE 1. ——— They are corrupt, they have done abominable works; *there is* none that doeth good.

O HOLY and eternal God! We have but to look at the lives of these men to be struck with horror at their impious doctrines. In vain do they attempt to persuade us that the strength and superiority of their reason have elevated them above vulgar prejudices, and led them to adopt the dangerous sentiments of infidelity;—it is weakness and the depravity of their hearts. Their lives are a dishonor not only to religion, but to every thing noble in man; the most infamous vices are, in their view, but the gratification of innocent inclinations which nature gives them, and which nature justifies; the most abominable desires, when once their corrupt hearts have formed them, need nothing more to render them lawful; the passions which each one finds in himself are the only infallible and unchangeable rules which nature, from the beginning, has given to man; they consider the violence which the righteous man does to himself, to suppress his passions, as an unjust constraint upon nature, and a tyranny which deprives him of rights born with him. Thus all their virtue consists in delivering themselves up, without reserve, to every thing which the profound corruption of their hearts demands of them, and in never contradicting or restraining any natural inclination. They sometimes affect the externals of wisdom and regularity; this,

however, is to accommodate themselves to the prejudices of their fellow men, while, in secret, they make a mock of the esteem which the prepossessions of mankind attach to innocence and virtue. They often boast of their probity, and of the rigid maxims of honor, in which they pride themselves; but, O God, what probity, what virtue of any kind, can there be in men who believe themselves permitted to do every thing which they desire to do? who consider the most shameful crimes as the gratification of innocent inclinations? who think they owe nothing but to themselves? who believe that thou lookest upon virtue and vice with an equal eye? and who know no other rule for their conduct but those very passions which are the source of all their sinful irregularities? As they perceive that their lives would render them the reproach of other men, if they were fully known, they put on the appearance of moderation and philosophy; they pride themselves in those external virtues which do honor to society; they would pass for faithful friends, and rigid observers of their promises; they make a vain ostentation of honesty and sincerity; but there is not one of them who is not in secret devoted to vice;—not one who is not a perjurer and a cheat, when he can be so with safety, and without injury to his reputation;—not one who is capable of doing a good action, if his interest or reputation does not require it;—not one, in fine, who refuses to commit any sin which promises profit or pleasure, provided he thinks it will never be known but by himself. Let them, then, with an insulting air, reproach us for our credulity and puerile deference to vulgar prejudices! Happy credulity! which teaches us to fear thee, O most great and glorious God! to love thee,—to obey thy holy and just laws,—to regulate our lives by them,—to be charitable to our fellow men,—patient under injuries,—submissive under afflictions,—humble in prosperity,—faithful to our masters and rulers,—mild and affable to our in-

feriors,—and equitable towards all men. Preserve in me, O God, that holy credulity which shall render me obedient to thy divine laws; and always inspire me with a suitable horror for that infidelity which renders man the vile slave of all the passions, and the continual sport of the extravagant and shameful irregularities of his own heart.

VERSES 2, 3. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one.

ALMIGHTY and most glorious God! Thou lookest, from the height of heaven, upon those enemies of thy truth and of thy glory; nay, thou art pleased to cast upon them thy merciful regards; and thou often troublest their false security by the secret influences of thy grace. Thou waitest for them to open their eyes upon the pit which they are digging for themselves;—that they may perceive at last the extravagance of that reason which places all its glory in a frightful singularity, and in forming to itself monstrous and wild systems, much more incomprehensible than the mysteries of religion;—that the excess of their phrenzy may bring them to acknowledge the truth which still cries to them from the bottom of their hearts,—that truth which all the efforts of their infidelity have not been able wholly to destroy. Thou waitest, O gracious God! whose mercies are more wonderful than all thine other works,—thou waitest that, undeceived by the secret agitation and horror which infidelity produces in their souls, and which all their pretended firmness cannot calm, they may at last seek happiness and true repose, not in disbelieving that thou art the witness of their actions, but in giving thee the supreme place in their hearts, after having banished thence those vices which put thee at a distance from them, and which, by thus rejecting

thee, leave them given up to the tyranny and fury of their passions; but thou waitest in vain. Infidelity leads its votaries into such devious paths, that a return from them is very rare. Men may forsake the foibles and follies of youth, but they scarce ever recover from such an impious perversion of their reason; years may lessen the violence of the passions, but the pride of infidelity grows and strengthens with years, and old age is the time when the infidel gives himself the most honor, and when he also draws upon himself the most praises from his associates. In vain, O God, dost thou operate upon these impious men by the common methods of thy grace; they consider the remorse and secret terror which thy Spirit may produce in them as remains of vulgar prejudices which education has still left in them, and which their own reflections have not been able to destroy. Such persons are useless to their fellow men, because they have shaken off the bond of religion, the only bond which could unite them to others;—useless to society, which they regard as a collection of beings whom chance has assembled together, and where each one has no law but himself;—useless to their country, since they look upon public authority as a usurpation upon the liberties of men;—useless to their relations, since they believe the titles of father, child, brother, husband, are titles which have no duties annexed to them any further than blind inclination shall ratify them;—useless, in fine, to themselves, since the reason which thou hast given them, to lead them to know thee, is a light which they abuse to the purpose of disputing thine adorable perfections: They are useless, and indisposed to every thing good;—they are dangerous men, the reproach of religion and society, who ought to find no asylum upon earth, who yet find apologists and admirers, in the midst of a nation which boasts of confessing thy holy name, and the truths of thy religion.

VERSE 4. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people *as* they eat bread, ———

O HOLY and eternal God! Can a doctrine so monstrous and absurd seduce men in whom all reason is not extinguished? Are there those to be found who work iniquity by system, and upon principle; in whom the commission of sin becomes like a religious tenet, an article of faith? and who, regarding as folly and credulity that holy system which preaches to us innocence and virtue, think there is no good sense, no superiority of reason, but in a system which gives them a continual lesson of vice, and even makes it a duty to do iniquity? Into what a thick cloud of darkness, O God of justice, dost thou permit a hardened heart to plunge and envelope itself! It is a terrible though just punishment that the man who refuses to know thee should not know himself. Still if his blindness was confined to concealing from himself the infamy and horror of his vices, we would adore, in secret, thy judgments upon the impenitent; but this blindness changes, in his view, the virtues of other men into vices. He reviles thy servants, and ascribes to them all the vices of which he is sensible that he himself is guilty. He cannot persuade himself that there is one righteous person upon earth, and he endeavors, secretly, to induce those who will listen to him to adopt the same ideas. His cruel teeth prey upon innocence, and he wishes to exterminate even the name of it from among men; this is his daily bread, and the most common food with which he nourishes his black impiety and malice.

VERSES 4, 5. ——— and call not upon the LORD. There were they in great fear: ———

WHAT resource, great God, remains for such impious unbelievers, under their afflictions? Thou art the consoler of the righteous when they are in trou-

ble; and they find in submission to the adorable dispensations of thy providence,—in the good which thy wisdom knows how to produce for them, even from their afflictions,—in the aids of thy grace,—and, in fine, in religion which teaches them to consider their sufferings as a just punishment for their sins,—in these things they find an alleviation of their troubles. But the infidel, who knows thee not,—who calls not upon thee,—who believes either that thou art not, or that thou takest no notice of what regards him, to whom can he have recourse, under the evils and disappointments which afflict him? What being in the universe can he invoke? He considers himself as the only arbiter of his destiny; he believes that he depends upon himself alone, and acknowledges no ties connecting him with an invisible power which is above him. He must therefore combat alone, under his sufferings, against all the creatures which rise up against him. In what a frightful solitude does he, at such times, find himself? without God,—without the approbation of his conscience, which, on the contrary, completes his distress, by the horrors which it presents to him,—without a hope that his troubles may be beneficial to him, since he knows no happiness but in the present life,—and without help from men, who, though they may be affected by his misfortunes, cannot relieve them? Where shall he raise his eyes? to whom shall he reach forth his hands? Nothing remains for him but, in despair, to give himself up to chance, in which, O God, he chose to place his confidence, rather than in thy goodness and wisdom, and precipitate himself, without knowing whither he goes, or whence he came, into the hideous darkness of infidelity which surrounds him. Infidels, who make so much ostentation of their firmness, are the most cowardly and the most timid of men, as soon as they have only a glimpse of the approaches of death. The slightest danger troubles and alarms them. As life is the only blessing which

they know or expect, whatever threatens that, though but very distantly, presents to their view a frightful spectre, which chills them with horror. Weak and foolish men! They fear for their bodies which are destined to corruption, and which they cannot long preserve, while they have no anxiety on account of their souls for which they might procure immortal felicity and glory; they fear the evils of the present life which are but for a moment, and which, if rightly improved, will be followed with eternal blessings, while they do not fear the evils which await them in eternity, and which will never end.

VERSES 5, 6. ——— For God *is* in the generation of the righteous. Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD *is* his refuge.

How different, O most merciful God! is the lot of those who love and serve thee here below from that of the infidel! The generation of the righteous have the consolation of always having thee in the midst of them, and into their hearts thou pourest abundantly the most powerful aids of thy grace. The idea of thy justice may alarm them, for a season, when near to death; but thou art soon present to calm the tempest, and to restore tranquillity and confidence. They may be overwhelmed with evils, with reproach, suffering, and persecution in this life; for the way of the cross, through which thou didst cause thy Son himself to pass, is the way by which thou most commonly conductest his brethren, to bring them to glory. But what encouragement and consolation do they not find in that hope? They know that the time of the captivity will soon end;—that they shall go forth triumphing from Babylon, to enjoy eternal peace in the new Jerusalem;—that there will be no more tears, nor sorrow, nor grief for them; and that the tribulations of the present life are very short, and very light, compared with the eternal

weight of glory which is destined for them, and which their afflictions themselves have helped to work out. If there is upon earth any solid satisfaction, under the calamities which befall us, it is only in religion that it can be found; without that, man must bear alone all the weight of his misfortunes; he must also bear the weight of his impiety, and he can look to nothing for relief but to the very load which burdens him. Yet, O God, the infidel insults the sufferings of thy servants; when he sees the righteous oppressed, when he sees them overwhelmed with adversity here below, he asks them with derision, Where is the God whom you serve, and what succor does he give to his worshippers? He treats as an illusion the hope which they have in thee; and regards them as fools for renouncing all pleasures for a God, who either cannot help them, or who is insensible to their distress. But the hope which is concealed in the heart of the righteous, and which is to them a fruitful source of consolation, confounds these impious reproaches. The blindness of him who thus derides them is more grievous to them than all the evils with which thou afflictest them; for they suffer with submission, and even with joy, the loss of their property and of all the good things of life, but a holy indignation seizes and transports them at a view of the outrages done to thy glory. The infidel, who had pretended to cover them with confusion as weak and credulous men, finds himself confounded, by the magnanimity of their faith, the firmness of the hope which supports them, and the heroic courage which makes them despise adversity, and disregard calamities which he, who is an enemy to religion, cannot contemplate, even at a distance, without trembling, and without yielding to the shameful passions and sinful weaknesses of which he is the mean slave.

VERSE 7. Oh, that the salvation of Israel *were come* out of Zion! When the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, *and* Israel shall be glad.

LET then the enemies of thy name and of thy holy doctrine, O most glorious God! cease to demand of us, with an impious and ironical tone, When will the Lord descend from the heavenly Zion, to reward those who renounce every thing flattering to the passions, to please him? and when will he bring to them the glory and salvation which they expect? These men, given up to sin, think there is no true wisdom but in enjoying the present; and they consider it as folly to deprive themselves of what is certain, and which it depends upon themselves only to enjoy, for the hope of an hereafter which either is not, or which no one can insure to them. Fools and madmen! As if thy promises, O God of truth, were not more sure and infallible than any thing which we see with our eyes;—as if under thy just government, the same destiny, beyond the grave, awaited thy faithful servants, and those who deny thine existence, perfections, and word;—as if man, who has within him an immortal soul, created in thine image, was made only to creep in the dust, a small number of days, like the beasts which perish,—to grovel in the pleasures of sense, and then disappear for ever, without there being any trace in the books of eternity, either of him, or of what he was during life. Do we not feel that we are made for something greater than any thing we see here below? Can pleasures, glory, honors, heaped upon his head, ever render man happy? Does he not always find a void in his heart, in the midst of every thing which he thinks will fill it? Is not his whole soul impressed with the desire and thought of immortality? Must he not wrest himself from himself, so to speak, in order to become persuaded that every thing within him will die with him? Can he ever, by means of heaping ini-

quity upon iniquity, entirely silence the dictates of his conscience, which compel him, in spite of himself, to distinguish what he endeavors to confound, and not to give the same names to virtues and vices? Can he attain to the belief that these are but mere chimeras to which credulity has given different names, in order to render them real?

Let infidels, if they can, nourish their security, by such black and abominable ideas; let them walk, if it is possible, with a firm step, upon a precipice so frightful, and with which reason itself is confounded; let them deride thy servants, O Lord, and consider as useless every thing which they do and suffer to secure thy favor;—their derisions will soon be turned into despair. We have but a short time to wait; for thou wilt soon come to deliver the righteous for ever from the servitude of the body, and from the troubles inseparable from their state of exile. This chosen people, this Israel, separated from the rest of the world, will eternally sing the praises of thy grace; joy, peace, a happiness which will never end, will be their portion; while unbelieving sinners, precipitated into a gulf of fire, will be punished, for their impiety and blasphemy, by eternal torments and remorse,—by the keenest anguish and despair.

PSALM XVI.

Meditations of a saint engaged necessarily in worldly scenes; with thanksgiving to God for having preserved him in the midst of so many temptations and dangers, and prayer for continued supplies of grace.

VERSES 1, 2. Preserve me, O God; for in thee do I put my trust. *O my soul,* thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou *art* my Lord: my goodness *extendeth* not to thee;

O LORD, obliged as I am to live in the midst of a world which knows thee not, exposed daily to its seductions, and finding nothing to encourage and animate me in thy service, but, on the contrary, examples calculated to corrupt me and lead me astray, all my safety is in the confidence which I have in thee. Thou didst preserve the three Hebrews in the burning, fiery furnace, continue to protect me, and to preserve my soul pure, in the midst of so many contagious objects suited to corrupt it. Each moment furnishes the world with new snares to seduce me; and each moment furnishes a new motive to thy mercy not to leave me to myself. Thou hast implanted the fear and love of thee in my heart; preserve in me this precious treasure,—suffer me never to lose it,—let it never be ravished from me. I know, O glorious God! that being all-sufficient, and finding in thyself an infinite fulness of glory and blessedness, thou hast no need either of my love, or of my fidelity, or of my homage. It is not for thy sake that thou succorest those who look to thee for help. Ah! what can feeble creatures, who are nothing but what thou hast made them to be, contribute to thy happiness;—creatures who subsist only by thee,—and who would all fall into that nothingness from which thou didst originally call them into being, if that all-watchful eye, which superintends them, should, for a single

instant, close itself upon them? But, O Lord, thou art my God, my refuge, my happiness, my beginning, and my end; and although thou needest not my prayers and my homage, still my own necessities urge me to offer them to thee continually. Thou wouldst not be God if men were necessary for thy glory; nor wouldst thou be God if, being so necessary as thou art for their happiness, thou shouldst stop thine ears against their supplications, and, having placed them upon earth, shouldst take no notice of what regards them. I will not cease then to say to thee, O Lord, thou art my God! That adorable name includes every thing; it implies that thou hast no need of creatures, and also that thou art absolutely necessary for their happiness, and ever ready to supply their wants.

VERSE 3. *But* to the saints that *are* in the earth, and *to* the excellent in whom *is* all my delight.

AND indeed, great God, how could thy saints lead a holy life, upon this wicked earth devoted to a curse, if thou wast not with them incessantly; and if they did not find, in thy powerful protection, aid superior to their weakness, and to all the temptations which surround them? Their example supports my confidence, and is a continual proof to me of thy mercy towards those who desire to serve and obey thee. I honor their piety; I regard it as a prodigy which thou workest in these days of declension and darkness, to render sinners inexcuseable; I seek to unite myself with them, that they may witness my conduct and reprove me if I should become unfaithful to thee. Thou knowest, O thou all-seeing God! that an intercourse with the wicked displeases and troubles me. Though their rank and titles may render them honorable in the eyes of men, they do not lessen the distress which I feel when a regard to decency and propriety obliges me, for a time, to associate with them; and I experience no true joy but from

the pious conversation of the faithful. In their company, O Lord, my heart finds a relief from all the vain agitations of the world; with them I can deplore the folly and vanity of worldly scenes, and speak freely of the wisdom,—of the excellency of thy holy law, and of the consolations which an observance of it always produces. And what matter is it if the righteous are obscure in the world; and have no worldly greatness to distinguish them in the eyes of men? Does not piety give a more splendid title than sceptres and crowns? Is it not a pledge of immortal glory, and of a kingdom which will never end? And what are all worldly dignities compared with righteousness and holiness? They are but transient honors which often leave nothing after them, or nothing but sins which the righteous, who are so vile in the eyes of carnal men, being seated on thrones of light, shall judge in the view of the universe.

VERSE 4. Their sorrows shall be multiplied *that* hasten *after* another *God*: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

THEREFORE, O Lord, I will eagerly seek the society of thy saints, and withdraw myself from the company of men who are given up to the world, and to their passions, as soon as I can do this without wounding the rules of decency, or the duties of charity. And how can I join their sinful assemblies, and take satisfaction in being there? Among them the reputation of their fellow men is unpityingly torn to pieces; even the virtue of thy faithful servants is no security against their malignant censures; and their most bloody arrows are aimed at the righteous. They are men of blood; and the wounds which their tongues inflict upon the purest innocence, become an object to amuse their indolence, and gratify their wicked hearts. They remind us of the horrors of those public diversions among the pagans, at which people as-

sembled, in infamous theatres, to see men wound and put each other to death, for the amusement of spectators. What a barbarous pleasure, O God, for those who live in Christian lands! They take delight in seeing the reputation of their fellow men murdered; and he who plunges the poignard with the most dexterity and success carries away the public acclamations and applauses of these assemblies of iniquity. Unforeseen circumstances, or such as arose from a discharge of duty in other respects, have sometimes led me to be among them; but far from applauding their cruel slanders, I seemed myself to feel the wounds which they inflicted on others. All the indulgence which these men of blood can expect from me is that I will endeavor to efface their cruel slanders from my memory; I will speak of them only to thee, O my God, and I will forget their names, which may be illustrious in the view of men, and embellish vain history, but it would be reproach to thy servants even to remember them.

VERSE 5. The LORD *is* the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

LET those deluded slaves of the world glory in their names, their titles, and the extent of their inheritances; let them be puffed up with the portion of wealth and honor with which the world has favored them; all that heap of vanity serves but to hide from them eternal blessings,—it has no solidity,—it can yield no permanent satisfaction. Such is the vile portion of men who mind only earthly things! I renounce it from this time forth, O Lord; I consent to be deprived of every thing which I have inherited from my ancestors, or acquired by myself, if thou seest that my heart is too much attached to it. Thou art the father of my soul; the heritage which thou promisest to thy children is thyself; it is an eternity of peace and happiness which they shall enjoy

in thy bosom; it is a fulness of glory and felicity which will fear no diminution, and which will endure as long as thou thyself. This is the portion of the children of heaven, and this is the portion which I choose. I wish for nothing but thee alone, O God; for every thing else flies from us,—escapes us,—and vanishes from our eyes, and thou only remainest for ever; all other things pollute us,—agitate us,—are but a wearisome and distressing revolution of fear, desire, hope, jealousy, solicitude, and chagrin, and thou only canst calm the inquietude of the heart, and restore to it that peace and consolation which the world cannot give, and which it even does not know. Not that these consolations are always sensibly felt by the faithful, and that the cup which thou givest them has never any bitterness in it; but this bitterness is on the surface only; below it is an inexhaustible source of sweetness and delight. And besides thou wilt one day give us this cup entirely free from all remains of bitterness which are now found in it, and we shall drink large draughts of that pure delight with which thou satisfiest thine elect. This, O Lord, is the heritage of thy children for which I sigh; reserve it for me, O kind and merciful Father! and suffer me never to forfeit it by my unfaithfulness. Dispose, according to thy good pleasure, of the transitory blessings of life, and of the portion which thou hast assigned me upon earth; but give me the eternal portion of thy children, which the blood of thy Son has purchased for them; let that be my heritage, and, of thy goodness, give me that grace which will insure to me its possession.

VERSE 6. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant *places*; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

THE more, O Lord, I compare the peace, the delight, and the secret pleasure, which spring from an observance of thy commandments, with the trouble,

the remorse, and the inquietude, which are suffered by those who give themselves up to passion and to the illusions of the world; the more do I applaud myself for my choice,—the more desirable does my lot appear,—the more am I surprised that all men, burdened with a yoke of sin, under the tyranny of passion, and even disgusted with those pleasures after which they run with so much eagerness, do not put themselves under thy delightful yoke, which is so consoling,—so easy to bear, and which would relieve them from the insupportable weight of all others. As for me, I find myself so happy in having chosen thee, that all the riches and honors of the earth do not appear to me worthy of the regard of a soul which has the happiness of possessing thee. How beautiful, how great, how worthy of man, is it to serve thee! How does that glorious servitude elevate man above all the thrones and all the grandeur of the universe! How does it render him superior to his passions, his prosperity, his losses,—to all the events which incessantly agitate other men!

VERSE 7. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

WHAT suitable thanksgivings can I render to thee, O most merciful God! for having given me the knowledge of these eternal truths? When I consider that they are hidden from most men,—that all their light, all their cares, and all their labors, are limited to the procuring of an imaginary happiness for themselves here below,—when I see them, with a fatal bandage upon their eyes, run, like madmen, to the precipice, without examining where their course will terminate,—when I say to myself, How is it possible that they should be so ingenious, so clear-sighted, so judicious, in managing their temporal interests, and that, with regard to their eternal concerns, all their light should abandon them, that they should not even

deign to make use of it, and that they should believe the interest of their souls,—that interest so great, so serious,—that only interest which they have upon earth,—that they should believe that to be unworthy not only of their anxious cares, but even of their thoughts,—when I reflect on these things, the incomprehensible blindness in which they live infuses into my heart new transports of love and gratitude to thee, O my God, for having opened my eyes upon truths so essential and so evident, but of which the greater part of mankind are ignorant, because they wish not to know them. From my necessary intercourse with a world, where all is error and delusion, I learn still more the inestimable benefit which has caused the light to shine upon me, in the midst of so much darkness. When I enter into that profound night in which I see the men of the world buried, my heart reproaches me for not having sufficiently thanked thee, that thou hast dissipated, as respects me, the thick cloud which envelopes them. Let this sentiment of gratitude never be effaced, for a moment, from my heart; let me carry it with me every where, and in the night seasons, let me awake, and take from nature the moments destined to sleep, to pour out my soul before thee, and renew my thanksgivings.

VERSE 8. I have set the LORD always before me: because *he is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved,

How can I, O most gracious God! lose sight of thy mercy towards me for a single moment, since that is all my consolation in my state of exile? Would this life, so full of chagrin and misery, be supportable, if thou wast not incessantly present to my heart, to sweeten its bitterness? Could I walk with safety, among so many snares and dangers, if I did not always walk in thy presence? In the midst of all the revolutions which the world exhibits incessantly before mine eyes,—of the daily vicissitudes which ele-

vate some upon the ruins of others,—of that whirlwind of cares, inquietudes, and competitions, whose perpetual agitation draws with it and puts in motion all the children of this world,—in the midst of so many tumultuous objects, I see thee, great God, as a wise superintendant, regulating all, and directing every thing which takes place upon earth, by divine and inexplicable ways, to the accomplishment of thine eternal designs of mercy towards thine elect; and making even the sins and passions of other men subservient to their salvation. Yes, thou art more visible than all the objects which strike our senses. I find and acknowledge thee every where, in the secret bitterness which thou minglest with the pleasures of sinners,—in the obstacles which thou puttest in the way of their passions, or the opportunities which thou seemest to give them for their indulgence,—and in the sudden elevation or depression of their fortunes. In all these things I see thy wisdom and goodness which dispose of events; which permit nothing but what will be for thy glory,—for the instruction of the righteous, or for the conversion or punishment of the wicked; and which furnish to all men, even in the objects which seduce them, resources and means of salvation.

VERSE 9. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

BEHOLD, O glorious God, what fills my heart with inexpressible joy! I see that chance has no part in any thing which happens upon earth; and that all events, even those which in appearance are the most fortuitous and the most surprising, are prepared in the eternal counsels of thy providence. People who look only to their own cares and endeavors, for the success of their schemes, are incessantly agitated with fears and hopes. Their hearts are never tranquil, because, instead of putting themselves into thy

hands, they give themselves up to the mercy of uncertain events. But as for myself, O Lord, I choose to rely absolutely upon thy wise and paternal counsels, with respect to every thing which now concerns me, or which will hereafter concern me. I am in thy hands, and this is enough to make me look, with a tranquil eye, upon all the situations in which it shall please thee to place me upon earth, be they distressing or agreeable. I shall find, in that idea, an inexhaustible source of joy and consolation; because I may say to myself, It is neither the malice nor the favor of man, but thou alone, O good and merciful father! who hast thus disposed of me. In every situation, therefore, I will sing to thee songs of joy and praise; I will receive, with equal composure, the transitory blessings and evils which thou shalt dispense to me. Every thing comes from thee, and whatever comes from thee I ought to view as a benefit conferred upon me. In this sweet confidence, I shall see the days of my pilgrimage upon earth cheerfully roll on; with this I will alleviate their troubles and lighten their burdens; I will anticipate death in peace,—I will regard it as a sweet repose, as a deliverance from all the dangers and all the temptations which here afflict thy servants; and I will look upon the grave, which shall receive in trust the spoils of my mortality, as a secure asylum which will restore them to me in the resurrection morn, to the end that thou mayest make them conformable to the glorious body of thy Son who has arisen from the dead.

VERSE 10. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

WHAT consolation, O my God, in that blessed hope! Those who bound all their desires and all their hopes by the narrow limits of this life, have nothing to comfort them under the trials which they here experience. The world to come is to them a

chimera, a chaos, which offers to their view only darkness and nothingness. They make haste to enjoy the present; but as a thousand vexations poison their enjoyment,—as the world itself, in which they seek a sinful happiness, often despises them, abandons them, or overwhelms them with its rigorous or cruel treatment, they find themselves unhappy, without any resource. They have nothing to console them but black melancholy, bitter complaints of the injustice of the world, or a frightful despair, concealed under the specious names of philosophy and contempt of mankind; and death will put an end to these transitory pains which they experience in this life, only by introducing them to more severe and more durable misery. Beyond the grave they have no cheering prospect; for they know not what they shall be in that dark and eternal abode, in the contemplation of which their reason loses itself, and to them religion presents nothing but frightful and tormenting objects. But as for those who hope in thee, great God, though they may be smitten, despised and afflicted, in this life, still the consideration of that future state which is near, and which is incessantly present to their eyes, dries up their tears; they know that, united to Jesus Christ their chief, they shall rise like him,—that their souls, instead of being confined in the grave, will mount aloft to mansions of bliss,—and that their flesh, if it has not the privilege, like the flesh of thy divine Son, of being exempt from corruption, in the abode of the dead, will one day be re-animated,—that it will be changed into living flesh, shining with glory and immortality,—and that a hair of their heads will not perish.

VERSE 11. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

FOR ever blessed be thy name, O Lord, that thou dost not permit me to lose sight of those consoling truths, and of that last hour which is to conduct me to life and immortality! The objects of sense and the cares of the world tend incessantly to put them at a distance from my thoughts, and to deprive me of them; but through this thick cloud, I see thee who art at the door, and who wilt soon require my soul of me. The terrible account which I shall have to render to thee troubles me, at times, and penetrates me with fear; but, O thou shepherd of my soul! thou hast not withdrawn me from the ways of sin and taken me in thine arms, to cast me away and leave me a prey to the devouring wolf. Thou soughtest me when I fled from thee; thou wilt not, therefore, abandon me now thou hast found me, and given me joy, by the marks of tenderness which I have received from thee, and by the consolation which I have found in returning to thee, and remaining united with thee. Open then incessantly to the eyes of my faith those everlasting gates which conceal from man the delights and inestimable blessings which thou hast prepared for thine elect. Upon earth there is in reality nothing but weariness and sadness. Though I should blindly abandon myself to the pleasures of life, I should every where find a void, or a satiety,—a secret inquietude which would poison them all. No, Lord, we are not made but for thee; and it is only in thine adorable bosom that we can find that repose, that perfect happiness which men have, for so long a time, sought in vain upon earth. We see thee here below only through the clouds of our mortality; yet we see enough of thee, O eternal source of light and truth! to love thee; but not enough to have that love fill our hearts wholly, fix them, and annihilate

all earthly attachments. When we shall see thee, face to face, and thy Son seated at thy right hand, then thy love will reign alone in our hearts,—it will absorb them wholly ; and that holy love, always satisfied and still always excited by thine adorable presence, will make us taste new delights, through all eternity.

PSALM XIX.

Meditations of a saint who, to strengthen himself in his fidelity to God, celebrates the divine perfections as manifested in the immensity of the heavens,—devoutly acknowledges the excellence, holiness, and sublimity of the divine law,—and prays for grace to keep him from sin.

VERSE 1. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work.

O MOST great and glorious God! How contemptible is the impious unbeliever, who prides himself in the superiority of his genius and understanding, in not acknowledging thy glory, thy greatness, and thy wisdom, in the magnificent appearance of the heavens and of the stars suspended over our heads! He is struck with the greatness of princes and conquerors, who subjugate nations and found empires; but he will not acknowledge the almighty power of thy hands which alone laid the foundations of the world. He admires the ingenuity and skill of a workman who has erected proud palaces, which the wind may overthrow and destroy, he even speaks of the structure of the heavens with admiration, and thus gives honor to chance; but he refuses to acknowledge thee in the constant and regular harmony of those immense and superb works which the revolution of times and years has always respected, and will respect to the end. Is it not a sufficient manifestation of thyself to mankind, that thou showest them every day these wonderful works of thy hands? Men of all ages and nations, instructed by nature alone, have acknowledged in them thy power and godhead; and yet the infidel chooses to contradict the whole human race, to attribute to credulity a sentiment universally prevalent, and to the prejudices of

education a light which was born with him, rather than to give up an absurd and incomprehensible opinion, in which his sins, the offspring of darkness, have forced his reason to acquiesce, and which his sins alone have rendered probable to him.

VERSE 2. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

IF the Lord had but once showed to man the striking spectacle of the stars and the heavens, the infidel might have considered them as a temporary prodigy; he might perhaps have persuaded himself that they were some of those sports of chance and nature, some of those transient phenomena, which owe their origin to a seemingly accidental concourse of atoms. But, O glorious God! this grand spectacle has been presented to the eyes of man from the beginning of the world. The succession of day and night has never been interrupted, but has gone on in a regular and majestic order ever since thou didst first establish it, for the decoration of the universe and the utility of man. The first day which enlightened the world published thy greatness, by the splendor of that immense body of light which then began to appear, and which in silent but most expressive language, has proclaimed to man thy power and glory, in all succeeding days. The stars which presided over the first night have presided over all others since; and, by the continual regularity of their motions, they have perpetuated a knowledge of the wisdom and majesty of the sovereign creator who formed them from nothing.

VERSE 3. *There is* no speech nor language *where* their voice is not heard.

YES, O Lord, the most gross, the most barbarous people hear the language of the heavens, whose mag-

nificence publishes thy glory. Thou hast established them over our heads as celestial heralds which cease not to proclaim to all the universe the greatness of the eternal king. Their majestic silence speaks the language of all nations, and of all ages; it is a voice heard throughout, wherever the earth nourishes inhabitants. The impious unbeliever alone shuts his ears against it, he chooses to listen to the impure language of his passions, which in secret blasphemously speak against thy supreme essence, rather than to the glorious voice of those astonishing works of thy hands, which have published thine existence ever since the creation of the world.

VERSE 4. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. ———

O GOD, let any one go to the most remote and most desert parts of the earth, he will find that the magnificence of the heavens proclaims thy glory there, as well as in regions the most inhabited and the best known. There is no place in the universe, however hidden it may be from mankind, where the splendor of thy perfections which shines over our heads, in the luminous globes which decorate the firmament, may not be seen. This was the first book which thou gavest to man, to teach him what thou art; in this Adam studied at first what thou wouldst manifest to him of thine infinite perfections; it was at the sight of these grand objects that, struck with admiration and with a respectful fear, he prostrated himself to adore their all-powerful author.—He needed no prophet to teach him what he owed to thy supreme majesty; the admirable formation of the heavens, and of the universe, instructed him sufficiently. He left this simple and pure religion to his children, but the precious deposit became corrupted in their hands. The stars, which shone only to proclaim to mankind thy glory became themselves their

gods. Fools and madmen! Under the influence of a corrupt heart, and led away by a vain imagination, they offered prayers and homage to the sun, and the moon, and to all the host of heaven, which could neither hear their prayers, nor receive their homage; and they no longer knew and acknowledged thee, great God! who hast placed those shining orbs over us, only to be signs and perpetual witnesses of thy perfections, and to conduct men, by these visible objects, to the knowledge and worship of thy supreme and invisible attributes. Such was the origin of an impious and superstitious worship which soon spread over the earth, and infected all mankind. The beauty of thy works made men forget what they owed to their author. O most glorious God! It is thy gifts themselves, spread through all nature, which, owing to our depravity, put us at a distance from thee; we fix the heart upon them, and refuse it to him whose beneficent hand sheds these favors upon us. Thy works and thy gifts, the blessings of life, the talents of the body and mind are our gods; it is to them only that our homage is paid. They were designed only to elevate our hearts to thee, by inspiring us with continual sentiments of love and gratitude; and yet the only use that we make of them is to put them in thy place, and employ them against thee.

VERSES 4—6. ——— In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which *is* as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, *and* rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth *is* from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

THE great lesson which the sun in the firmament is designed to teach man is its regularity in the course which thou, O God, hast ordained. Faithful to pursue the path which thou didst trace out for it, from

the beginning, this resplendent star has never deviated. Its brightness in which thou hast manifested thy glory and power has attracted impious and foolish homage from corrupt men. They seem not to have comprehended that by obeying thy commands, in the constant uniformity of its revolutions, it proclaims to men that all their greatness consists in the discharge of their duty, and in never departing from the way which thou markedst out for them when thou calledst them from nothing. Great God! inanimate creatures always obey thee; it is only in the heart of man that thine eternal laws find opposition and rebellion. The sun, like a joyful bridegroom coming forth from his nuptial chamber, rises and regularly goes round this vast universe. He sheds every where his heat and light, and each day re-commences his majestic course; while man, inconstant, and never remaining like himself from one moment to another, has no fixed and certain course which he pursues; he incessantly contradicts himself in all his ways, and every day is marked with changes and irregularities which make him lose sight of himself. His course resembles that of a madman, who goes and comes and returns, without reflecting where his steps are to lead him; he fatigues himself, he exhausts himself, but never attains his object. His inconstancy is burdensome to him,—it becomes a heavy weight which oppresses him, and yet he cannot relieve himself from it; it constitutes his sin, and it also constitutes his misery and his punishment.

VERSE 7. The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple.

O GLORIOUS and eternal God! The silent but expressive language of the sun, moon, and stars, which proclaims thy greatness to the universe, and points out

the worship and homage which are thy due, has not been understood by the greater part of mankind; it was necessary, therefore, that thou shouldst speak to them by thy prophets, and in these last times by thy Son.

What hast thou not done? what wonders hast thou not wrought to bring men back to the ways of truth and salvation from which they have wandered? Thou hast spoken to them thyself; thou hast pointed out to them the duties and observances which thou requirest of them; in an obedience to thy holy law thou hast comprised every thing which could render them happy upon earth, and fit them to possess, at a future day, the inheritance which thou hast prepared for them in heaven. How pure are the precepts of that law! how holy and worthy of man are they! They do not resemble the vain-glorious lessons and dogmas of heathen philosophers, who aimed only so to regulate the external deportment as to secure applause for themselves and their proud disciples. But thy holy law extends to the regulation of the heart, and to the correction of its sinful affections; it requires a radical change in man, and that he should become such within as he appears without. An external and superficial worship would not be worthy of thee, O God,—of thee who art the God of our hearts, whom we cannot honor but by loving thee supremely, and who esteemest no homage to be sincere but that which the heart renders. The teachers of proud philosophy promised wisdom to their disciples; but what wisdom is that which leaves to man all his misery, and proposes only to gain the applause of the world? What wisdom is that which is the offspring of pride, and of the curious and vain researches of the human mind? True wisdom, O my God, is found only in the observance of thy holy law; it is not the learned only, and sublime geniuses, who have a right to pretend to that; it is the portion of the simple and the ignorant, as well as

of the most learned; it is communicated to the small as well as the great,—to subjects as well as sovereigns,—to the Scythian as well as the Greek,—to Barbarians as well as to the most polished people. Thou offerest it to all men; it bears witness to thy love for them, and to the fidelity of thy promises to them; and so far are knowledge and dignity from giving an exclusive right to it, that it is necessary to become humble, and like a little child, to attain to that sublime wisdom, and become an accomplished disciple.

VERSE 8. The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes.

ALL human systems leave doubts and darkness in the mind; they also leave to the heart its inquietude and distress, because they leave to it all its passions. But thy holy law, O glorious God! by banishing from the heart all sinful affections, banishes from it trouble, and establishes tranquillity. Man, given up to his passions, is a prey to a thousand secret enemies which trouble and devour him; his soul is the frightful abode of weariness, of cruel remorse, of the most distressing agitations. Peace is the fruit of innocence alone, it results only from the love and practice of thy law; obedience constitutes all our happiness upon earth, because it is that which establishes order in our hearts, and with order that peace and joy which are its inseparable attendants. The systems of ancient philosophy engaged men in continual and laborious researches, which never terminated in any thing but increasing their inquietudes and doubts. Each leader of a sect boasted of having found the truth, and the several sects disputed continually with one another, each claiming to possess the truth exclusively; but these very disputes showed sufficiently that no one of them had found that to which they all pretend-

ed. And this, O Father of lights! because it is not to the proud efforts of human reason that thou hast promised the discovery of truth. The more men have labored, in search of it, in this way, the farther from it have they been removed. Thy law alone can enlighten the mind; the truth, so long time sought elsewhere in vain, shows itself there, at the first glance of the eye; it is necessary only to love thy law in order to know the truth; we have only to listen to thee as thou speakest in thy holy word; we have no need of deep researches; we have but to submit to thee, and exercise a humble faith in what thou hast plainly revealed.

VERSE 9. The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

HUMAN systems vary continually; the disciple adds to the discoveries of his master, and departs from his instructions; thy law alone, O thou unchangeable Being! is always the same. Heaven and earth shall pass away; the world and its customs shall change; the monuments of human pride shall be destroyed, and others erected on their ruins; the revolution of time will efface the most superb titles and inscriptions; but it will never efface one iota from thy divine law. It is the character of truth alone to remain always, and to be always the same. This immutability has ever vindicated the truth; it will continue to defend it against the enterprises of error and novelty, and render inexcusable those who are rebellious,—who refuse instruction,—who abandon the stable truths of thy word, and suffer themselves to be blown about by every wind of doctrine.

VERSE 10. More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey comb.

WHEN any one loves the truth he will find no difficulty in submitting to it; but the love of the truth is a humble and docile love. Pride often leads us to put the false light of our own understandings in the place of truth; we think we love it, when we love only our prejudices and our own thoughts; we think we sacrifice every thing to it when we are only the victims of our own proud conceits. There is nothing truly desirable upon earth, O God, but a humble temper of mind, constantly disposed to receive instruction from the oracles of thy law. That false glory which men may attain by combatting them will, sooner or later, be turned into shame. Faith, made perfect by love, is that pearl of great price with which we have every thing, and without which, though we should have all that men desire the most, we should have nothing truly valuable.

Give me then, O gracious God! that docile spirit which shall subject my reason to the truths of thy law, and my heart to the love and observance of its precepts. This is the only treasure,—these are the only riches after which I sigh. Gold and precious stones may embellish the body, but they do not enrich the soul. The pleasures of sense may be alluring to us, but they cannot satisfy us; they always leave an aching void or a piercing sting in the heart. Nothing but obedience to thy commands can infuse peace and joy into the soul; and the satisfaction thus produced is far superior to all the pleasures of sense, and all the vain felicities of the earth.

VERSE 11. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward.

I REMARK, O most merciful God! can render this testimony to thy grace. Since thou hast withdrawn me from the devious ways of sin, and fixed in my heart a resolution to obey thy law, I taste a peace and delight which I never tasted in the gratification of my passions; I rejoice daily for having found, in an obedience to thy precepts, that happiness which I sought in vain in the world. How rich art thou in mercy, O God, so liberally to reward thy servants, even in this life! All happiness, all blessings accompany that wisdom which is from above; peace of conscience, submission under trouble, thy protection in danger, moderation in prosperity, prudence in all their steps, a sanctified improvement of all events, thy smiles upon all their enterprises,—such, great God, are the blessings which those enjoy who keep thy holy law!

VERSE 12. Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse thou me from secret *faults*.

BUT, O holy God, where is the just man upon earth who can flatter himself that he obeys thy law as he ought to do? A perfection in holiness,—an entire exemption from all moral stain, is not given to men here below. As regards myself, O God, altho' my conduct may appear irreproachable in the eyes of man, can I promise myself that it is so in thine eyes? Can I understand all the irregular desires of my heart, many of which are formed without my knowledge at the time? How do I know but that in my good works, in which I seem to have promised to myself only to please thee, there has been a mixture of secret pride, and some improper motive unperceived by myself? How do I know but that in many of the religious services which I have performed a desire to gain the praises of man has been a secret

motive which has influenced me? How do I know but that with my grief at the sight of the sins of my fellow men,—sins from which I thought myself exempt, there has been mixed a secret self-complacency, and even a spirit of pride? How do I know but that my leading a regular life, and avoiding the pleasures and tumult of the world, has proceeded from idleness and a love of repose, rather than from a true love of regularity and holiness? How do I know but that my apparent zeal to correct those, whom thou hast placed under my direction and authority, is in thine eyes an impatience,—a harshness of temper, or the effect of pride, rather than an emotion excited by a tender and Christian love? How shall I solve these difficulties? Where is the man who can clearly understand what the darkness of his heart and of his self-love may conceal from him? Our only resource, O God, is to address ourselves to thee, and incessantly beseech thee to purify us from all those secret stains, which it is almost impossible for us either to know or avoid while upon earth.

But a new motive for fear, and one much more terrible to thy servants, is the sin to which they may have given occasion in other people, while they still followed the ways of the world, and lived in the indulgence of their passions. This is daily to me a cause of fear and great lamentation. How many souls may have perished through my seduction or example? My rank and elevation served only to render my sins the more conspicuous. Those who were dependent upon me were not only the witnesses but sometimes the unfortunate partakers of my guilt. The credit which my name gave to the sins committed by me was a stumbling block to thy servants, while it furnished to sinners new authority for their trangressions. And how can I make reparation for that innumerable multitude of sins of which I may have thus been the occasion in other people, and of which I am ignorant? My tears and repentance

can never expiate them, but thy grace, O Lord, can pardon them. A heart deeply affected with penitential sorrow always finds access to the throne of thy mercy, and thou always grantest the pardon of sin when thou inspirest us with sincere repentance.

VERSES 13, 14. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

O MOST merciful God! If I have occasion for so much anxiety on account of my secret sins, how much more reason should I have to fear, if I were to be guilty of wilful, presumptuous transgressions? Give me then the restraints of thy grace; let not the lusts of the flesh prevail against me; let not that pride which is so deeply rooted in my heart,—let not self-love lead me to violate essential obligations and the immutable precepts of thy law; suffer me never to be separated from thee; and let not my heart cease to become a temple for the Holy Ghost. Then, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer! I may hope that, daily lamenting before thee the sins which I daily commit, the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, may be acceptable in thy sight; and that thou, who didst create my soul, and who hast redeemed me by the blood of thy Son, wilt so far purify me from mine iniquities as to fit me for the enjoyment of thy promised blessings.

PSALM XXIII.

Thanksgivings rendered by a saint to God, for having turned him from the ways of sin, and called him to a knowledge of the truth; with a comparison of his present with his former situation.

VERSES 1, 2. The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: ———

O MOST glorious God! Thou art the only father and the true shepherd of our souls. I was for a long time a wandering sheep; I listened not to thy voice, although thou didst not cease to call upon me,—to speak to my heart. The world spake louder than thou; it spake to my senses, and mine ears were open only to its voice. It fascinated mine eyes, and made thy pastures appear to me unpleasant, dry, and covered with briers and thorns; while, on the contrary, it represented its own as places sown with flowers, where pleasures would continually spring up around my steps. Yet I found I wandered there in dryness and want; under those deceitful flowers I found, at every step, a serpent whose cruel bite incessantly annoyed me; the pleasures which offered themselves to me, instead of satisfying me, only excited my thirst for new pleasures; the passions which successively sprung up in my heart were so many tyrants which, each in its turn, destroyed my peace. I sought continually for something to satisfy me, and relieve me from my inquietude; and when I flattered myself I had found it, in a moment after I perceived my error; I then changed the object, but my secret uneasiness still remained, and nothing filled the void in my heart. But, O my adorable shepherd! since I have quitted those miserable and poisonous pastures, and returned into thy fold, how different is my situation! Tranquil under thy

guidance, free from those distressing cares and agitations which always attend sinful passions, my heart is in its place; nothing more is wanted by it, and it has no desires but to follow thee, and to serve thee with more love and fidelity. What delight, what abundant consolation, may we not find in thy pastures, and in the ways in which thou leadest thy sheep? The pleasures there experienced are not like the pleasures of the world which, from being long enjoyed, become insipid; the more they are tasted, the more delicious they are found to be; the more thou art followed, the more does a desire of following thee increase. The world promises pleasures, and gives nothing but crosses and chagrin; thou, O Lord, hast told us that crosses await us, in thy service, and yet these crosses are the sources of ineffable consolation.

VERSES 2, 3. ——— He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: ———

THE world led me to empoisoned waters, to satisfy my sinful thirst for pleasures; but the more I drank of them, the more severe my thirst became. They were like burning coals applied to my heart; and the more I sought to cool and refresh myself, the more did I find myself inflamed. But the water with which thou, O my God, hast quenched my thirst, is that water which springeth up to everlasting life; those who once drink of it will no more thirst for the world nor its pleasures. One single drop of that celestial water refreshes and comforts the heart more than all the rivers of Babylon; it is a clear and peaceful stream which carries with it no dirt nor pollution; whilst the water of Babylon is but a stream polluted with mud; and like a furious torrent, it hurries along all those who stoop to drink of it into the gulf of destruction. O most merciful God! thou hast saved me from this ruin; thou hast reached forth a

hand to pluck me from the midst of those waters, which were upon the point of swallowing me up; and my soul knew not the danger which threatened until after thy mercy delivered it from impending destruction.

VERSE 3. ——— He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

SUFFER me, O most gracious God! here to review, as in thy presence, thy mercies towards me. It was not enough to pluck me from the gulf when I was about to sink; thou continuest to uphold me, and thou teachest me the pathway of life. Until men are brought to know and love the truth, they are continually exposed to many evils; in escaping from one worldly danger, they often fall into a greater danger; they wander from their ways, but do not enter, as they ought to do, into thy ways; and even thy servants sometimes step aside from the right path, and aim to go to thee by bye-paths, different from those by which thou wouldst lead them. But, O God, thou leadest me in the paths of righteousness; thou hast taught me that to attend to the duties of my station and situation in life is the only way of safety; that in discharging them with faithfulness I should fulfil all righteousness; that works seemingly holy, when incompatible with those duties, are not acceptable to thee; that it is an illusion to prefer what a false zeal may recommend to what thou plainly requirest; and that thy will is clearly pointed out in the duties which thou hast connected with my particular station, whilst in all pretended religious services which prevent my discharging those duties, I have nothing clear and sure to guide me,—nothing but my own will. Thou hast taught me this, O my God, of thy free grace and mercy; and as thy gifts never come single,—as thou continuest to give to those to whom

thou hast begun to give, thy servants may safely confide in thee to guide their feet in the ways of peace.

VERSE 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou *art* with me: ———

AFTER all the dangers from which thou hast saved me, O divine shepherd of my soul! what can I fear as long as I walk in thy ways? Though thou shouldst leave me, for a season, in that state of dryness and darkness in which the most faithful souls are sometimes left, the very hand which would smite me would also encourage me. I should know, O my God, that it is thou who createst, as thou pleasest, light or darkness,—thou who manifestest thyself to the soul, with every thing which thy presence has in it consoling, or who hidest thyself from our eyes under a thick cloud, to prove our faith; I should always perceive thee within me operating these consolations or these troubles, and my confidence in thee would always be the same. Though darkness might seem to proclaim that thou forsakest the soul, and givest it up to the shadows of death and sin, and though it might deprive me of lively consolation, yet it would not shake my faith, because I should know that thou art ever with me.

VERSE 4. ——— Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

O MY adorable shepherd! The wolf often enters into thy pastures, there to seek his prey; but thy rod and staff are sufficient to defend us, and put him to flight. There is nothing to be feared but by those imprudent sheep who separate from the flock, and choose to wander in paths which thou hast not pointed out. Even thy servants, O divine Saviour! from the remains of corruption that are still in them, some-

times grow faint and weary, but thou wilt not suffer any to perish whom the father has given to thee; thy power sustains and supports them; thou takest them in thine arms when they are upon the point of falling, and unable to continue their course. It is not thou that failest them; thy help is always ready; it is their unfaithfulness alone which puts this help at a distance, or renders it useless to them. I have experienced this many times; my languor and weariness in thy service have always originated in my own unfaithfulness. In proportion as I have sought consolation from sensible objects, or from any thing in myself, thou hast withdrawn from me the comforts of thy grace. Thy ways, O God, are not in themselves hard and painful; all the inconveniences we suffer in walking in them arise from ourselves; we carry into them all the briers and thorns which annoy us.

VERSE 5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: ———

THIS world, O merciful Father! is an accursed land, fruitful in sorrow and distress, and furnishing no remedies for the evils it produces. Its pleasures, having become insipid, from that satiety and disgust to which they always lead when long pursued, cannot console the worldling who endures grief and bitterness in his heart, in consequence of his losses and afflictions. Whatever speaks to the senses only can give no comfort to the soul, under the evils and inquietudes which the sinner suffers. Though surrounded with external sources of consolation, he finds that these do not penetrate the surface, and that the sting still remains within. The world is an ungrateful and deceitful master, which smiles at our misfortunes, and which, while pretending to solace us under them, seeks only to aggravate them, and to seduce us by its false promises.

But as for thee, O merciful God! thou hast provided, with the goodness of a father, for all the wants and infirmities of thy children; thy bountiful table is always spread, and always ready to receive them; thou there givest thyself to them; and in this divine nourishment they find a sure remedy for all their weaknesses, and a real consolation under all the troubles which the world brings on them. By descending thyself into their hearts, thou carriest thither an inexhaustible source of peace and joy; thou repairest its ruins; thou strengthenest that which was weak; and, supported by that heavenly food, thy children walk with new courage towards the eternal mountains. How much to be pitied then are men of the world for depriving themselves of such powerful aid,—for refusing thy favors,—for not coming to thy table,—and for considering thy service as burdensome and painful!

VERSE 5. ——— Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

O LORD, in that feast of love which thou has prepared for thy chosen ones, thou pourest unspeakable consolation into their souls, and thy cup fills them with divine joy. The perfumes of Egypt may preserve the body from corruption, and secure to it a long continuance, without decay, in the melancholy abode of the tomb; but the oil of that precious perfume which thy grace pours into our souls purifies them, adorns them, renders them more vigorous, and strengthens them to obey thy commandments. It implants within them a germ of eternal life, which not only preserves them from corruption and decay, but which assures to them, at their departure from their mansion of clay, an eternal abode in thy bosom.

O divine Father! to thy rebellious children thy table affords no pleasure, to them it is disgusting, and to them thy cup is bitter. I am not astonished at

this ; it is because their taste is depraved and corrupted by the love of sensible and terrestrial objects. How can they, who are brutalized by drinking continually of the polluted waters of Babylon, find satisfaction in the pure water of life ? They only, whose hearts are purified by grace, and emptied of a love of the world, can relish the sweetness of thy cup ; they only will be filled with a pleasure so heavenly, so lively, and so engaging, that every thing else will become insipid and nauseous to them ; they leave it with regret, and to be deprived, though but for a short season, of this divine nourishment, they consider as the most grievous of all their calamities.

VERSE 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

FOR myself, O God, I hope that thy mercy will never permit me to be deprived of the greatest consolation which thou givest us in this state of exile. Assist me more and more to give up all earthly attachments, that I may be the better fitted to enjoy the rich blessings of grace ; let thy goodness and mercy continue to follow me ; feed me with the bread of heaven, and give me to drink of the refreshing waters of life. This shall be my sweetest hope during the days of my pilgrimage,—during my continuance in this strange land, in which thou communicatest thyself to us but in part ; this, O my God, will make me wait with patience for the happy moment in which thou wilt open to me the eternal doors of thy heavenly temple,—of that paternal mansion, where we shall see thee unveiled, and where we shall dwell during the long continuance of an eternal day.

PSALM XXVIII.

Meditations of a saint bewailing before God the impious derisions to which he finds himself exposed, in consequence of his piety, from those with whom he is obliged to live; and prayer for grace to enable him to continue stedfast in the love and service of God, notwithstanding the temptations and difficulties in his way.

VERSE 1. Unto thee will I cry, O LORD my rock; be not silent to me: lest, *if* thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God! Thou seest the deplorable situation in which I am placed. I know nothing really great and desirable upon earth except the happiness of serving thee; but the duties attached to my station in life connect me with many people, who consider piety in no other light but as an object of their derision and censures. With secret horror I hear them, every day, impiously revile the ineffable gifts of thy grace, and treat the zeal and fidelity of thy servants as weakness, imbecility, and perversion of mind. As it was formerly so now, the world considers those upon whom thou bestowest the gifts of thy Spirit as men of unsound minds. The conversion of sinners, that miracle of thy mercy, so well suited in itself to lead men to adore and praise thee, furnishes them with new matter for derision, and for speaking against thy holy name; and wherever they see true piety, which is the only thing worthy of admiration in this world, it excites their contempt and ridicule. Obliged to be a witness of an error so deplorable, and exposed myself incessantly to these impious revilings, all my consolation, O my God, is in addressing myself to thee, and pouring out the grief of my heart at the feet of

thy throne. Although these profane derisions make no impressions upon me, at present, but those of horror and pity, I fear that at last they may weaken me, —make me less bold and open in thy service, and even lead me to dissimulations unworthy of thy glory and of my infinite obligations to thy mercy. I fear that I shall insensibly become so cowardly as to blush when charged with having a regard for thee, and to refuse to attend to the influences of thy Spirit, on occasions when I ought to render a public testimony to the truth, against the reproaches of those who wish to dishonor it. I fear that a sinful timidity will disguise in me, under the specious name of prudence, a silence and caution which proceed only from an improper regard for man. Self-love, which seeks always to remove what gives us pain, is but too successful in persuading us, that we ought prudently to manage the prejudices of those with whom we are obliged to live;—that we shall render religion more odious, by refusing to relax any thing from its strict requirements before those who do not love it, and that we shall bring new reproaches upon it by unseasonably professing it in public. I fear, great God, that this poison will insinuate itself, by little and little, into my heart; for though I feel no inclination to have my conduct resemble that of those sinners with whom I am connected by my situation in life, still I wish not to displease them; though I have no desire to imitate them, still I wish not to stir them up against me; though I say to myself, it is impossible to serve thee and please a corrupt world, still I fear I shall lose sight of this truth in times of temptation. What resource then remains for me, O Lord, in this agitation of mind, but to implore thine aid? Fortify me against that fear of man by which we can never be influenced but at the expense of thy glory and of our fidelity to thee. Let me hear that strong and courageous voice speaking to my heart which formerly rendered the followers of my Saviour superior

not only to the censures and derisions of the world, but also to all the barbarity of tyrants. If thou leavest me to myself, if the voice of thy grace does not speak to my heart, and enable me to overcome my natural weakness and timidity, I feel that I shall quickly fall; I see myself on the borders of a precipice, and that, unless I am upheld by thee, I shall, by a criminal compliance with the wicked, become like them that go down into the pit.

VERSE 2. Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

PRAYER, O God, is the only resource of man in times of danger, and thou always comest to the help of those who call upon thee in truth. Make me perceive, more and more, the folly and deplorable error of the opinions of the world. How can I ever suffer myself to be influenced by language which the intoxication of the passions, and a total subversion of reason alone are sounding in my ears? Would the raillery of a fool or a madman appear to me sufficiently important to govern my conduct? And what are those who prefer a momentary sensual pleasure in this life, to the eternal blessings promised by thee in the next, but madmen, whose delirium ought to inspire us with detestation, if the misery to which they are exposed did not rather call for our grief and pity? Strengthen my faith, O gracious God! by a view of these immutable truths. This is what I will not cease to ask of thee; these are the vows which my hands, raised towards thine eternal temple, where thine ears are always open to our supplication, shall not cease to bear to the feet of thy throne.

VERSE 3. Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, ———

O GRACIOUS God! Do not suffer the example of those foolish persons, who glory in delivering themselves up to sin, and in despising religion, to overcome me at last, and bring upon me the unhappiness of displeasing thee, by drawing me into a sinful compliance with them. Through thy singular mercy thou hast called me from the ways of perdition; thou hast withdrawn me from those scenes of sensual pleasure in which I was heedlessly running on, in the broad road to destruction. If the duties of life still oblige me to associate with the wicked,—with men who mind only earthly things, my inclinations, my sentiments, my new light derived from thee, separate me from them in heart. Let nothing, O my God, be capable of again attaching me to them. My condemnation would be much greater than theirs if, after the grace with which thou hast favored me, I should again enter into their ways, and thus expose myself to those terrible judgments which thou exercisest upon apostates. Should I now fall away from thee, I could not expect thy mercy to pardon me, nor thy grace to renew me to repentance.

VERSE 3. ——— which speak peace to their neighbors, but mischief *is* in their hearts.

IN vain, O my God! do these worldlings endeavor to allure me by false semblances of kindness and friendship; in vain is their language to me the language of peace, of cordiality, and of tenderness; in vain do they say that the singularity of my conduct is the only thing which prevents a cordial union between us, and that from real love to me they wish me to forbear living apart from them, and to enter again into their society. This apparent kindness is only to conceal the most criminal designs; their real

object is, with these soft words, to infuse into me the poison with which their own hearts have long been infected.

VERSE 4. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors : ———

NOT content with insulting thee themselves, O God, these bold transgressors are constantly occupied in endeavoring to make others accomplices in their sins. Thou wilt therefore, O Thou who takest vengeance ! render to them according to their works ; thou wilt severely punish men thus devoted to sin, who wish to infect all who approach them, and to extirpate, if they can, all virtue from the earth,—who are apologists for licentiousness and vice,—who declare open war against thee, and applaud themselves as having gained an honorable victory when they have succeeded in seducing any one from thy service. Yes, great God, thou wilt inflict an eternal malediction upon those children of iniquity who thus aim to ruin others. Thy goodness towards man will call forth the thunder of thine indignation against such corrupters of society ; and thy justice will display all its severity against those impious sinners who study continually to render useless thy gracious and merciful proceedings towards men.

VERSE 4. ——— Give them after the work of their hands ; render to them their desert.

THEY have recourse to every expedient, O God, to remove men as far as possible from thy worship and service,—to raillery, to impious language, to the most open licentiousness and debauchery, and to a public contempt of religion. To plunge all who approach them deeper into wickedness is the desire of their hearts, and many times the deplorable work of their hands. O holy and righteous God ! thou wilt

put such sinners at a distance from thee for ever; as they have considered it great gain to themselves to raise up enemies against thee, thou wilt punish them by permitting them to continue thine enemies through eternity; this is the dreadful recompense which awaits them; and what more suitable and just punishment can there be for those who wish to excite the hearts of all men to rebel against thine adorable majesty, than to leave them under a fatal necessity of hating thee eternally?

VERSE 5. Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.

BLINDED by their passions, to which they give themselves up without restraint, the admirable wisdom displayed in thy works, and the wonderful prodigies which thou, O Lord, hast wrought, from time to time, for the salvation of men, are not regarded by them. That supreme though invisible being who rules all things here below,—who, in an adorable manner, disposes of all events, and makes even the passions and vices of the wicked subservient to his eternal designs of mercy, is to them as if he was not. In vain, O God, are thine infinite power, justice, and wisdom continually manifested before them, in the different revolutions which agitate the earth; they shut their eyes that they may not see; they live as if they were made only for a world with which they will be connected but an instant, and as if every thing was to end with them. To a blind and fortuitous concourse of the parts of unformed matter, they attribute the wonderful arrangement of the universe, and the most surprising effects of thine almighty power. Brutalized and corrupted in heart and mind, they do honor to gross inanimate beings; and they ascribe to the movements of rude matter an order, an admirable harmony, and a constant but regular change in the

productions of nature, which they would not dare to attribute to the understanding and power of the greatest and most intelligent creatures.

Thy justice and thy glory, O holy and righteous God! demand that thou shouldst take vengeance of such men, in a singular and public manner;—of men who, giving themselves up to the most shameful excesses, glory in affronting thee, and who find, even in their sins, nothing more delightful to them than the impious pleasure of thus dishonoring thee,—who, not content with reviling thine adorable majesty themselves, continually seek to take from thee thy worshippers, and, by their impiety, to corrupt and infect all who approach them,—and who, if it were possible, would banish from the minds of all men the idea of thine eternal essence. Having delivered them up to the most shameful excesses of passion,—having permitted that every thing good in them should be destroyed, that all principles of common honesty and humanity should be banished from their minds, thou wilt leave them in this terrible situation even to the end; they will never rise from that total destruction of every thing good in which they are overwhelmed; they will die detested by men whom they had endeavored to lead into sin, and abandoned of God whom they had publicly rejected; they will die the shame of human nature, the reproach of religion, and the anathema of heaven and earth; and if their name continues after their death, it will be but as a perpetual monument of thy justice towards such bold and impious transgressors.

VERSE 6. Blessed *be* the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications.

O MOST gracious God! Can I ever sufficiently bless thy holy name, for the abundance of mercy which thou daily sheddest upon me a weak and sinful creature? Having drawn me from an abyss of sin,

thou enablest me to guard against the corruptions of my own heart, and to resist the temptations which surround me; thou showest the absurdity as well as horror of that libertine and impious language which I so frequently hear, and preventest what there is specious and striking in it from weakening or corrupting me. In the midst of my troubles, and of the dangers which surround me, I call upon thee, and thou comest to my help. I feel myself filled with new strength; the clouds are dissipated, and the light of truth brings peace and courage to my soul, notwithstanding the timidity and distress into which the darkness of sin had thrown me.

VERSE 7. The LORD *is* my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.

GREAT God! Thou dost not forget us in times of trouble, but our unfaithfulness and want of confidence oblige thee, in righteous judgment, to suspend thy succor. As thou art the maker and father of creatures formed in thine image, thou art disposed also to be their asylum and protector. As thou hast called us into being, and given thy Son to redeem us from sin, thou wilt aid us, if we look to thee for help, to walk in the pathway of life, that we may arrive at last to those mansions of blessedness which thou hast prepared for thy people. Thou foresawest the misery which man would bring upon himself, by falling from that state of holiness and happiness in which he was created, and thou preparedst for him a remedy, a redeemer who might elevate him to a more sublime rank than that from which he fell. What an inexhaustible source of confidence in thy goodness do these consoling truths afford to thy creatures! Thus a hope in thine infinite mercy is a most firm buckler which my heart opposes to all the

assaults of the enemy. I feel myself stronger in proportion as this hope increases; the weight of the flesh is less burthensome, and its risings against the spirit are less powerful and less frequent. But this calm does not put my vigilance to sleep; I too well know that it is not promised to us while here below, that it shall continue long at any one time; and the use I wish to make of it during the happy moments in which I enjoy it, is to unite all the powers of my soul in praising thee and celebrating the wonders of thy power and goodness.

VERSE 8. The LORD *is* their strength, and he *is* the saving strength of his anointed.

O MOST great and glorious God! All that is in man is but weakness; thou only art the strength of those who love and obey thee,—of that chosen people who will praise and bless thy name eternally. They have nothing in themselves but a propensity incessantly to step aside from the pathway of righteousness into the devious ways of sin. This is all that thou findest in them, and if thou shouldst withdraw for a moment, if thou shouldst leave them to themselves, they would immediately fall. It is not sufficient for thee, therefore, to shed thy grace upon thine anointed, and turn them from the ways of sin for once; thou must also be their continual protector, and carry on to perfection the work of salvation which thou hast begun in their hearts. This continual dependence on thee, instead of being burthensome to them, is all their consolation, as it is all their safety. How delightful it is, O God, to live always as in thy hands! not to be able to act and move but under thy notice, and under the care of thy paternal goodness? How light and pleasant is that yoke! And what more terrible punishment canst thou inflict upon sinners than to deliver them up to themselves,—to their passions,—to their remorse,—to their

secret agitations,—to the terrors of their own consciences! This is a misery the unhappy beginnings of which thou makest them feel in this life, and which will be fixed and consummated in eternity, if they persevere to the end in their hardness.

VERSE 9. Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever.

CONTINUE then, O God, to save the people whom thou hast chosen, and cease not to shed upon them the aids and blessings of thy grace. Defend thine inheritance, and leave it not, for a moment, exposed alone to the enemy, who watches for an opportunity to spoil it. The blood of thy Son has purchased it; let a price so valuable render it still more dear to thee. Purify it more and more, and enrich it daily with new gifts of thy Spirit, to the end that it may be fitted to become a glorious and eternal kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

PSALM XXIX.

Thanksgiving rendered to God by a new convert, for that gracious and powerful voice which had so wonderfully called him to a sense of sin, and finally to a knowledge and love of the truth.

VERSE 1. Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength.

O YE children of God, ye pious souls! who have the happiness of loving and serving so good a master, join in praise with me; unite your thanksgivings with mine, and offer unto God not the blood of victims, but your pure praises and your fervent homage. By the greatness and fervor of your gratitude, supply what is deficient in that which I feel in my heart; come to the help of my insufficiency, and assist me to testify to that merciful father who has recovered his son, for so long a time a rebel against him, all the grief and all the gratitude with which a sense of my sins and of his mercies now inspires me.

VERSE 2. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

RENDER to the Lord the honor and glory which are due to him alone, for the wonderful change wrought by him in my heart. He found in me nothing but an impious hardness and inveterate habits of sin; and in this deplorable condition, when there appeared no resource for me, he changed me into a new man, that the glory of his name and the power of his grace might be displayed, with the more magnificence. To him only it belongs to work such wonders. Proud unbelievers, who refuse to acknowledge him in the structure of the universe, and in

the other works of his hands, ought, here at least, to perceive the finger of the most high. Nothingness, O most great and glorious God! cannot resist thee; it obeys thy voice; but a heart hardened by sin opposes thee, and thou often callest upon it in vain. Thou wast not, therefore, so great and wonderful when thou calledst the heavens and earth into being from nothing, as thou art when thou commandest the stubborn, rebellious sinner to come forth from the abyss of sin, and enter into thy ways, and when thou createst in him a new heart. This chaos of sin and darkness which thou bringest into order and harmony by the power of thy word,—upon which thou pourest out thy Holy Spirit, and thus givest light to it, proclaims to man thine almighty power and infinite goodness much more than the magnificent order and light which thou broughtest forth from the darkness and confusion of the primitive chaos. At the view of what God hath wrought in my soul, go then, ye who doubt whether there is above us a supreme being whose power, wisdom, and goodness gave existence, motion, and order to this vast universe, go into his holy temple, and humble yourselves before his terrible majesty; cast at his feet your foolish doubts, the impious fruit not of your reason and reflection, but of your sins; and confess that your unbelief is rather a dreadful desire that there was no God,—no just judge to call the wicked to account, than a real and serious doubt of the divine existence.

VERSE 3. The voice of the LORD *is* upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD *is* upon many waters.

GREAT God! The torrents of tears which run from my eyes proclaim thy divine presence in my soul. My heart, before so dry, so withered, so hard,

—that rock which thou hast smitten, as thou didst formerly smite the rock in Horeb, and caused such abundant and salutary waters to flow from it, resists thee no longer. I hear that powerful voice which shakes the mountains,—that voice which thunders and opens the heavens upon the sinner,—which commands the clouds to pour bountifully upon him their refreshing waters, and which changes the dry desert of his soul into a fruitful field, bringing forth an hundred fold.

VERSE 4. The voice of the LORD *is* powerful; the voice of the LORD *is* full of majesty.

IT is that voice, O glorious God! which speaks, and every thing is done; which commands, and every thing obeys;—that voice whose power, whose glory and magnificence fill the universe, and penetrate the deepest abyss,—that alone could cause itself to be heard at the bottom of my heart. In vain had thy ministers, sent forth by thee, often announced to me thy holy will, and the misery which I was preparing for myself by my sins; their voice struck my ears, but went not to my heart. I heard the most terrible truths with an insensibility accompanied with impious contempt. My pride saw nothing but weakness and littleness of mind in the commendable zeal of those who wished to draw me from my sinful ways, and I ascribed to myself a superiority of reason, from the very excesses which degraded me below the rank of a reasonable being.

VERSE 5. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

BUT thy voice, O God,—that voice which brings down every high thing that would raise itself against thy holy truth,—that voice which breaks the cedars of Lebanon, and overthrows those proud hearts which

wish to exalt their arrogant reason, and their vain reflections, above the clouds, even into the secret places of heaven,—that voice has cast down my pride, and humbled my feeble reason; it has made me perceive the weakness and insufficiency of my understanding, and left me nothing but the shame of having been rash enough to pretend to pry into thine incomprehensible counsels, and the most sublime mysteries of religion, when I knew not myself, nor the daily and most common occurrences in nature.

VERSE 6: He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

THUS, O glorious God! humbled before thy terrible majesty, I find I have been like beasts which have no reason. Like them I delivered myself up to the government of appetite and passion, and never made any use of the rational faculties with which thou hast embellished my soul. I lived but for my body, as if that was the whole of my being; and I retained nothing which distinguished me from the brutes, but the sin of having debased and degraded every thing in me which ought to have raised me above them.

VERSES 7, 8. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.

YES, great God, it is thy voice alone that has been able to penetrate the abyss into which my sins had plunged me, and to produce in my heart the first sparks of that divine fire which has purified it from its stains;—it is that alone which sought me, and humbled me at thy feet, in that frightful wilderness in which, like another prodigal, I lived at a distance from thee. In vain did I fly from thee, and seek a refuge against the reproaches of my conscience, in

places where nothing seemed likely to be able to recall me to thee,—where I was far removed from the institutions of religion and the means of grace,—and where I had none to witness my conduct who would throw any restraint upon my passions: It was there, where I thought I had found a retreat inaccessible even to thee, O most merciful God! and where I intended to enjoy my sins with tranquillity,—It was there that thy voice smote me, and brought me low at thy feet. The wonders which thy powerful voice daily produces in nature, by making the lightnings flash,—by shaking the mountains and the most remote deserts with the noise of thy thunder,—by opening the clouds, and pouring the rain of heaven upon the thirsty earth, and suddenly fertilizing lands which a parching drought and a long barrenness had changed into frightful solitudes,—these O glorious God! are but faint images of the wonders which thou hast wrought in my heart.

VERSE 9. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of *his* glory.

THOUGH I was struck with the enormity of my transgressions, a sinful shame still kept me back from acknowledging to man those infamous vices with which I had not been afraid to pollute myself in thine eyes, O glorious God! Though I had been a sinner without shame, and without any restraint, I found myself a timid and fearful penitent, and for a season, blushed to have witnesses of the distress which I felt for my sins. But thy voice,—that voice which thunders in the air,—which drives the most timid animals from the deep recesses of the forest,—which forces them to abandon the darkest places and the thickest woods, to show themselves in the open plains,—that voice has been more powerful than my shameful timidity; it has compelled me to go

forth from that darkness in which my heart wished to conceal itself, and has laid open those obscure and inaccessible retreats, in which I had secluded myself with my sins. I now no more fear the light; I no more blush but for having been so long a time a rebel against thine authority; I desire that all those who have been witnesses of my sins, might be witnesses also of my repentance, and of thy mercy to my soul; and not being able myself to give thee sufficient thanks for the greatness of the favor shown to me, I wish, O most merciful God! that all men might go with me into thy holy temple, and to the feet of thine altar, there to celebrate the glory of thy name, and sing the praises of thy grace.

VERSE 10. The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth king for ever.

THE abundant tears which thou, O Lord, hast drawn forth from mine eyes, notwithstanding the hardness of my heart, shall not be dried up. The deluge of waters with which thou didst formerly inundate the earth, was but a transient miracle, which thy justice wrought to punish the sins of men; but the salutary waters of repentance shall continue to flow from mine eyes. This shall not be like a momentary prodigy, but my repentance shall continue as long as my days upon earth roll on. Thou didst not impress my heart, O Lord, to abandon it a moment after, and suffer it again to quench thy spirit; thou wilt there establish thine abode for ever; thou wilt there reign eternally as a sovereign, and nothing will be able to dispute with thee the possession of a conquest which belongs to thee by so many titles.

VERSE 11. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

O MOST gracious God! Multiply such wonderful instances of repentance among thy people; shed upon sinners those efficacious blessings which will change them into new men; and extend the empire of thy grace, in the midst of a nation which enjoys the external privileges of the gospel. Thou didst formerly render thine ancient people victorious over the Canaanitish nations which conspired their ruin. The enemies which attack thy people of the present day are the more to be feared as they are invisible. Luxury, pleasure, ambition, hatred, impiety, have succeeded to the Philistines and Moabites. Endow us, great God, with that strength which nothing can resist; to defend us from those enemies which daily ravage thy heritage, and disfigure its beauty; and establish among us that peace which thy Son has left for his people, and in the midst of which thou so much delightest to dwell. Cause us to have peace within ourselves, and we shall soon have it with all men. Destroy the passions which are the only sources of wars and crimes; purify our nation from the sins which disgrace it; let not the fruit or our peace and prosperity be effeminacy, pleasures, and luxury, but purity of doctrine, faith and piety, a regard for true religion, and a universal attention to thy worship.

PSALM XXX.

Reflections of a saint reviewing the sinful and miserable state from which God had graciously delivered him, and giving thanks for the wonderful mercy which had been shown to him.

VERSE 1. I will extol thee, O LORD; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me.

HOW great art thou, O God, when thou turnest from the error of his ways, a sinner so unworthy of thy mercy as I have been! Thou forgettest his rebellion and his atrocious wickedness; and this is not enough,—thou preventest him with thy favors. Thou makest thy glory manifest not by taking vengeance on thine enemies, but by calling to thee those who had offered thee the greatest affronts. Thy power would not appear all that it is in punishing rebels; it is displayed in its clearest light when it suddenly changes them into submissive and penitent children. When thou calledst me from nothing into being, O thou great Creator! one word was sufficient; and indeed more would not be necessary for the production of a thousand worlds, as magnificent and perfect as that which we see. But when it was necessary to conquer my rebellious will, to recover it from that state of nothingness, with regard to all good, into which it had fallen, thou spakest to it more than once; thou calledst upon it for a long time in vain; it resisted thy power, but thy clemency was not exhausted, and thou mercifully overlookedst the new dishonor which I cast upon thee by my continued resistance. Thou hadst no need of me, and yet, notwithstanding I fled from thee, thou didst not cease to call upon me. I could not live happy without thee, and yet I desired thee not; I persisted in living at a distance from thee, and declared myself against

thee. But at last thy long-suffering has triumphed over my rebellion, and my continued rejection of thy mercy; thou hast drawn me from the pit, and put me under the wings of thy love; thou hast established me in all the rights of thy children to which I had no claim; and thou hast not suffered that thine enemies, the angels of darkness, should triumph to the end in the shameful captivity in which they held, bound in chains, a soul destined to reign with thy Son, and to celebrate thy praises eternally, in the holy city, the new Jerusalem.

VERSE 2. O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.

O LORD my God! no sooner had I begun to perceive the depth of my misery,—no sooner had my heart, after having been, for a long time, impressed by the secret influences of thy grace, begun to turn towards thee, and, from the deep abyss in which it was plunged, to send forth feeble cries of grief to the feet of thy throne, than thou didst cast upon me a look of mercy. A sudden light shone into my darkened mind; a new strength roused me from my languor; a breath of life animated my clay; and all the powers of my soul resumed that integrity and that vigor which man lost by sinning against thee. My malady appeared desperate, but thou hast healed me, and nothing now remains of it but the shame and grief of having once loved it.

VERSE 3. O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

FROM what a gulf hast thou drawn me, O most gracious God! And can I, during the rest of my days, sufficiently proclaim thine eternal mercy? It seemed that my soul had become the prey of hell,—that my place there was already marked out for me,

—and that I was of the number of the reprobate who are to be eternally the victims of thy justice. My name appeared to be written, in terrible characters, in the book of death, among those miserable beings whom thy vengeance precipitates into an abode of horror and despair. What a wonder of mercy, O my God! Thy voice was heard in the deep pit, and thou hast plucked me from it. I was reposing myself, with tranquillity, in the shadows of death and sin; I was daily sinking deeper and deeper into the miry clay; I there slept quietly, and perceived not the danger and horror of my condition. When I was in this situation, thou, O Lord, didst awaken me, my whole soul trembled at a view of its abject condition and misery; covered with confusion and shame, I dared not raise my eyes to thee, but my deeply afflicted heart spake to thee by its profound grief, and thou hast given to me life and liberty, blessings which I had forfeited,—blessings which I did not deserve to enjoy.

VERSE 4. Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.

O YE saints, who have helped me, by your prayers and counsels to come out of that deplorable state, —ye who have some knowledge of the excess of my former misery, bless with me that all-powerful and merciful God who has delivered me from it. Let the prodigy of which you have been the spectators lead you to endeavor to rouse the confidence of drooping sinners, who are discouraged by the enormity of their sins. Let the recollection of my deliverance enter into every relation of the wonders wrought by a holy God; let new songs of praise preserve the memory of it to the most distant ages; and let this miraculous instance of goodness be recorded, and celebrated to the end, in the history of God's mercies towards his people.

VERSE 5. For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favor *is* life :———

O LORD, thou dost not willingly chastise us; thine anger is the anger of a tender father, more affected with the misery of his children than with their opposition and rebellion. The blows with which thou smitest us, in thy seeming indignation, are rather remedies than punishments. By afflicting us, thou seekest rather to call us to thee than to punish us; and the calamities, the humiliations, and the disgraces, with which thou chastisest sinners while here below, are scourges which thou drawest from the treasures of thy mercy. Thou infusest a bitterness into our enjoyments, but it is a salutary bitterness, and designed less to punish us than to lead us to repentance. If thou shouldst leave us to enjoy our sins with tranquillity, and if nothing should disturb our criminal pleasures, this would be a most terrible mark of thine anger. Shouldst thou leave us in possession of a false happiness, in the midst of our licentious indulgences, this would give them a fatal attraction which would render our servitude delightful to us, to the end of our lives. Thou therefore sowest with thorns the road which we are prone to think is covered with flowers; and as we proceed in it, disgust, chagrin, disappointments, infirmities, multiply upon us. We fly from the path of virtue as painful and difficult, and yet find in that of vice troubles, constraints, contradictions, and sorrows, much greater than those we imagined to be in the path of virtue. Thou seest fit also, sometimes, to smite the righteous, and to bring upon them afflictions and losses, to purify their virtue, to try their faith, or to punish their want of fidelity in thy service; but these transient and momentary sorrows, which they experience during the present life, and which thou always alleviatest by secret consolations, serve only to render them more fit for that happy and eternal life which thy good will has prepared for them.

VERSE 5. ——— Weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning.

THE present life, in which, being at a distance from thee, O God, we are incessantly in danger of losing thee, in consequence of the snares and temptations which surround us, is to the souls which love thee an obscure night,—the abode of sorrow, of mourning, and of fears. Wo to those who feel not the troubles, the distresses, and the dangers, of this state of banishment! and who make to themselves, of the place of their captivity and of their pilgrimage, a place of delight. They are punished for their error by pursuing a happiness which they never find, and by exposing themselves, after having suffered a thousand painful inquietudes, to that terrible and perpetual unhappiness which is to succeed the miseries of this life. They add one pleasure to another,—they give themselves up to every thing which the senses and passions offer to them as agreeable, and yet, even while enjoying them, they perceive their emptiness and insufficency;—they try every thing, and every thing fatigues and disgusts them; yet they dare not acknowledge this. Through a deplorable affectation, they boast of a felicity which they do not enjoy; and while their mouth renders a testimony in favor of the happiness of the world and its pleasures, their heart in secret, incessantly contradicts this testimony.

Can it be, O God, that a sinner should obstinately go on to destruction, by a way in which he finds so much disgust and trouble; and that an experience of evil so long, so general, and so constant, should not lead him to choose the lot of thy faithful servants? Let him interrogate the righteous,—let him ask of them if that life which to him appears so gloomy, so full of trouble, and so melancholy,—if denying themselves those worldly pleasures after which most men foolishly and eagerly run, makes

their days, as they roll on, unhappy to them? Let him ask them if that show of felicity which the world offers to its votaries, raises their envy,—if they are sorry that they are weaned from every thing which excites the eager desires of the world? They will answer that the tears which they shed before thee, O Lord, leave a pure joy in their hearts; that the vain pleasures which they sacrifice to thee are nothing worth, and that one moment of peace and consolation, arising from a pure conscience, produces in the heart more real satisfaction than sinners enjoy in a whole life of criminal pleasure. The troubles of the righteous resemble the shortlived dreams of the night. As soon as the day of eternity begins to dawn upon them,—as soon as, being freed from the darkness of mortality, they see the morning arise, that bright beginning of an eternal day on which they are about to enter, their past sufferings and afflictions appear to them no more than a dream. The holy delight with which they find themselves filled, when they awake, hardly leaves to them the remembrance of those afflictive but transient images which had occupied them during the rapid moments of the night; or if they still remember them, it is but to render new thanksgivings to their benefactor, who has rewarded an instant of light tribulation with an eternal weight of joy, of glory, and of happiness.

VERSE 6. And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.

THOU wast pleased, O God, to permit that every thing should favor the indulgence of my passions,—the affluence in which I was born, a course of prosperity which I could not have expected, and the friendship of the great. Nothing from without appeared to disturb the sinful happiness which I sought at a distance from thee. Fool that I was! This phantom of felicity seduced me, and I formed a thousand

vain projects, as if it was to continue for ever. I said to myself, that my situation promised me every thing agreeable in future, and I foresaw nothing that could destroy or even disturb my pleasures. I saw only happy days before me, and thought not at all of the perpetual vicissitude of all human things, nor of the adorable but secret counsels of thy justice, which almost always punish the passions of men, by throwing confusion and disorder into those very passions.

VERSE 7. LORD, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: ——

I DID not consider, O gracious God! that I derived from thee alone that abundance and that prosperity in which I found myself; I did not reflect that the same hand which had thus raised me could, in a moment, bring me down; I did not in my thoughts ascend to the source of all mercies,—to that God whose eternal good will bestows favors or inflicts chastisements upon his creatures, and who makes the blessings and evils, which he distributes in the universe, subservient to the accomplishment of his inscrutable designs with regard to the destiny of man. Instead of loving thee, as the author of all the blessings which I enjoyed, I turned thine own gifts against thee; I made use of the abundance in which thou causedst me to be born to gratify my sinful passions; the more thou hadst favored me, the more did I affront thee; and whilst thy providence, whose counsels are an unfathomable deep, impenetrable by our feeble light, delivered up to hunger, to nakedness, to misery, many righteous persons, who called upon thee when thus forsaken, thou loadedst me with the good things of life, though I ceased not to abuse thy supreme goodness. The favors which thou bestowedst upon me were like arms in the hands of a furious madman; I brutally turned them against the benefactor from whom I received them.

VERSE 7. —— Thou didst hide thy face, *and* I was troubled.

THE enormity of my ingratitude, O Lord, could not turn away thy mercy from me; but seeing that I abused my health and my prosperity, and that the temporal favors which thou daily heapedst upon me became new allurements to my passions, thou didst suspend those favors, and, in thy great mercy, dispense to me afflictions and losses. Thou didst appear to me as an angry God, and as determined no longer to bless me with thy kind regards; but that seeming anger has been infinitely more happy to me than the favors which preceded it. I had abused thy kindness, but thy chastisements recalled me to myself. I had lived tranquil in my sins while in a state of prosperity, but melancholy reflections, and keen remorse for my past sins, arose in my heart in consequence of the evils with which thou didst visit me. By disturbing the tranquillity of my passions, thou didst disturb the dangerous peace of my soul. Smitten in my person and property, I awoke from the deep sleep in which I was buried; I opened mine eyes upon my deplorable situation, and began to feel those first agitations which the heart experiences when about to return to thee. Thus, O God, didst thou favor me in thy seeming anger, and chastise me in tender pity and loving kindness.

VERSE 8. I cried to thee, O LORD; and unto the LORD I made supplication.

I THEN began to perceive that all those false blessings which surrounded me had nothing solid in them;—that we depend upon nothing real and durable when we do not depend upon thee, O God;—and that a sinner, however happy his situation may appear to be, resembles a man condemned to death, who, on his way to the place of execution, walks in

a path covered with roses and flowers. Affrightened at last to see where this vain prosperity was conducting me, I resolved no more to pursue a phantom which I had seen, so many times, vanish in an instant, and which was leading me with hasty steps to the precipice. I raised my voice to thee, O merciful God, who, notwithstanding the enormity of our sins, wilt listen to our cries when, with a penitent spirit, we address ourselves to the throne of thy mercy. I became sensible that the great and powerful of this world, whose favor I had so constantly courted, were not worthy of the attention and homage which I had lavished upon them;—that their only object, in their apparent kindness to me, was to make me subservient to their happiness, rather than to render me happy;—that ingratitude is the only price which they pay for the most zealous services rendered to them;—and that those whom they have treated as friends become a burden to them as soon as they can no longer contribute to the gratification of their passions. Thou alone, great God, appearedst to me a master worthy of being served. Our importunate prayers are not troublesome to thy greatness; thou even requirest them of thy creatures; thou lovest to be urged, to be intreated, to be importuned; and we may always depend upon thy tenderness and upon thy favor, so long as we preserve our fidelity to thee. We need not fear with thee, those reverses and disgraces with which the caprice and inconstancy of men of the world every day reward those who had been the most faithfully attached to them. With thee we have nothing to fear but from ourselves; thou changest not; and if thou dost not always appear to be the same towards us, it is because we first cease to be what we ought to be towards thee.

VERSE 9. What profit *is there* in my blood, when I go down to the pit? ———

WITH what goodness, O God, didst thou come to me as soon as, under a sense of sin, I implored thy mercy! My past excesses seemed to take from me all hope of pardon, but a heart broken with repentance thou wilt not despise; and it must be that thou lovest to pardon such, since repentance itself is a gift of thy grace, and it is from thee alone that we derive those penitent feelings, in consequence of which thou never refusest to pardon our transgressions. Yes, O most merciful God! thou art the injured party; and yet it is solely to the blessings of goodness with which thou preventest us, that we owe those penitential tears, and that sorrow for sin, to which thou hast promised forgiveness. And indeed, what would it redound to thy glory to strike a sinner with death, though he has arms in his hands against thee? Would it have been a triumph for thy power if thou hadst cast me into the abyss, stained with the pollution of my sinful life? Would my blood, with which thou wouldst have stained the earth by destroying me, have been a satisfaction to thy justice, or made thy power appear terrible? One single look from thee would be sufficient to make the universe disappear, and to precipitate it into its original nothingness. Would it then be an astonishing prodigy, or display the power of thine arm, for thee to crush a worm of the dust? What opportunities wouldst thou not have, O God, to manifest thy justice if thou lovedst to punish? How many crimes daily call for thy vengeance from this region of darkness? Thou seest them, but this is not the time of thy vengeance; and if thou seemest sometimes to smite the wicked in thy holy indignation, it is less to punish the guilty whom thou thus smitest, than to influence the spectators of their punishment, or the accomplices of their crimes, to return to thee.

VERSE 9. ——— Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?

GREAT God! Thou art of thyself sufficient for thine own happiness, and thou canst not receive any thing from men's hands. Thou hast no need of man, and it is not, therefore, for thyself alone that thou punishest the wicked, or callest them to repentance. For what can dust and ashes contribute to thy glory, or to thy happiness? Can our praises or homage add any thing to thy supreme greatness? They are indeed altogether unworthy of thee, and cannot be acceptable to thee but through the infinite worthiness of thy Son.

VERSE 10. Hear O LORD, and have mercy upon me; LORD be thou my helper.

IT is only then in the infinite treasures of thine eternal mercies, O most gracious God! that I ought to look for the motives of those blessings of goodness with which thou hast prevented me. Thy mercy triumphed over thy justice, and plucked from thy hands the thunder, for a long time ready to fall upon my head. Thou showedst me to myself; thou openedst mine eyes upon the abyss of iniquity into which I was plunged; but thou didst not permit that when struck with the multitude and enormity of my sins, I should add to them, like many other sinners, a despair of ever obtaining forgiveness; and that, from having led a life so sinful, I should draw an impious and foolish reason for continuing, with tranquillity, thus to live. Whilst pointing out to me my misery, thou also showedst me a remedy. I was struck with the excess of my sinful indulgences, but I was not wholly discouraged by them. My heart, penetrated with the most lively grief, humbled and dismayed, sent forth to thee cries of compunction; thou becamest its only resource, and it cast itself into thy

paternal bosom. Thou heardest me, because it was thou alone who formedst in my heart that voice of repentance which implored thy mercy. Thou hadst pity upon a rebellious child who, after long wandering from thee, returned to thee; thy paternal bowels were moved with compassion, and the more destitute and distressed thou sawest him to be, the more was thy tenderness towards him excited. It seemed little to thee to pardon him, and to forget his rebellion and his many affronts; thou hast taken him under thy protection; thou hast restored to him all the privileges of a child; and the more his wants had multiplied, while he lived at a distance from thee, the more hast thou bestowed upon him thy help and thy favors.

VERSE 11. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;

O MOST merciful and gracious God! Can I, in pouring out my heart here in thy presence, recall all thy mercies in favor of a sinner, upon whom all the severity of thy justice could never have inflicted punishments so rigorous as his deserts? The recollection of my sins overwhelmed me, and plunged me into a profound sadness; on whatever side I turned mine eyes, I saw nothing but a pit of destruction open under my feet; and all the powers of my soul could hardly suffice for the bitterness of my grief.—But that my feeble nature might not at last yield to the excess of my distress, and that I might not be overcome by the violence and continuance of my groans, thou changedst them into holy pleasures.—The tears of my repentance became tears of joy and gladness; they made me taste in my heart, a delight a thousand times more lively and more pure than I had ever tasted in the indulgence of my foolish passions; and my grief itself became my sweetest consolation.

VERSE 12. To the end that *my* glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

THOU hast caused it thus to be, O glorious God! to the end that, convinced by my own experience of the happiness of those who, having renounced the sinful indulgence of the passions, serve thee with a sincere heart, I might publish the peace, the blessedness, the pure pleasures, inseparable from a holy life. Thou hast designed that I should be a public witness of thy mercy towards repenting sinners. Under thy mild and easy yoke, I shall not experience the bitter chagrin which I have so many times suffered from the shameful yoke of the passions. The world is a tyrant to those who deliver themselves up to it; the piercing thorn is concealed under the flowers which it strews in our paths. We embark upon a sea calm and tranquil in appearance, whose shores resound, on all parts, with songs of joy and pleasure; we at first glide smoothly forward, pursuing a peaceful though fatal course; but storms and tempests soon arise, and we are dashed with the most violent and terrible waves; yet we obstinately persist, notwithstanding our agitations and distress. But, O God, the way which leads to thee is pleasant and smooth; thou givest to those who walk therein thine own hand to lighten every thing which might be burdensome to them; yet most men fear this way, they fly from it, they consider it as wearisome and grievous. Let my tongue then be for ever devoted to the purpose of undeceiving my fellow men from that great delusion which leads them astray. Let me publish the wonders of thy grace, and proclaim the ineffable consolation which thou givest to them who walk in thy holy ways. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever!

FINIS.